

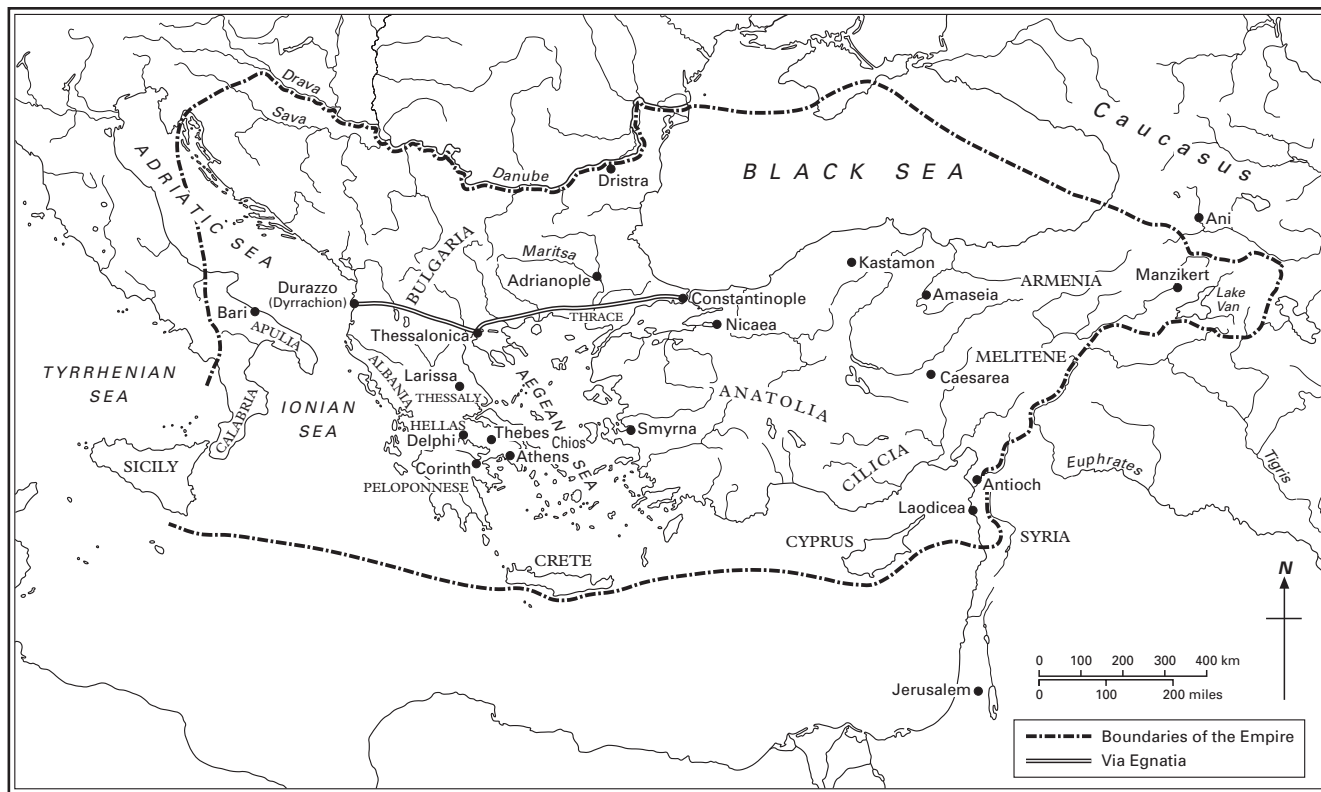
CHAPTER 8

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE, 1025-1118

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I

BASIL II died on 15 December 1025 after a reign of almost fifty years. He left Byzantium the dominant power of the Balkans and Near East, with apparently secure frontiers along the Danube, in the Armenian highlands and beyond the Euphrates. Fifty years later Byzantium was struggling for its existence. All its frontiers were breached. Its Anatolian heartland was being settled by Turkish nomads; its Danubian provinces were occupied by another nomad people, the Petcheneks; while its southern Italian bridgehead was swept away by Norman adventurers. It was an astonishing reversal of fortunes. Almost as astonishing was the recovery that the Byzantine empire then made under Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118). These were years of political turmoil, financial crisis and social upheaval, but it was also a time of cultural and intellectual innovation and achievement. The monastery churches of Nea Moni, on the island of Chios, of Hosios Loukas, near Delphi, and of Daphni, on the outskirts of Athens, were built and decorated in this period. They provide a glimmer of grander monuments built in Constantinople in the eleventh century, which have not survived: such as the Peribleptos and St George of the Mangana. The miniatures of the Theodore Psalter of 1066 are not only beautifully executed but are also a reminder that eleventh-century Constantinople saw a powerful movement for monastic renewal. This counterbalanced but did not necessarily contradict a growing interest in classical education. The leading figure was Michael Psellos. He injected new life into the practice of rhetoric and in his hands the writing of history took on a new shape and purpose. He claimed with some exaggeration to have revived the study of philosophy single-handed. His interest in philosophy was mainly rhetorical. It was left to his pupil John Italos to apply philosophy to theology and to reopen debate on some of the fundamentals of Christian dogma.



Map 5 The Byzantine empire in the eleventh century

Modern historiography has singled out the period from 1025 to 1118 as the watershed of Byzantine history. G. Ostrogorsky has provided the classic interpretation.¹ He saw the eleventh century as the beginning of Byzantium's inexorable decline, which he attributed to the triumph of feudalism. Private interest gained at the expense of the state. Without effective central institutions it was impossible to mobilize the resources of the empire or provide any clear direction. Symptomatic of the decline of central authority was the struggle for power between the civil and military aristocracies. The latter emerged victorious with the accession to the throne of Alexios I Komnenos. But his success was limited and his restoration of the empire superficial, because 'the Empire was internally played out'. Ostrogorsky meant by this that the peasantry and their property were coming increasingly under the control of great landowners. He believed that this compromised the economic and demographic potential of the empire.

Ostrogorsky's presentation of the history of the Byzantine empire in the eleventh century has been attacked from two main directions. P. Lemerle doubted that the eleventh century was a period of absolute decline at Byzantium.² There is too much evidence of economic growth and cultural vitality, which he connects with 'le gouvernement des philosophes'. The tragedy was Alexios I Komnenos's seizure of power, which substituted family rule for the state. R. Browning would add that Alexios damped down the intellectual and religious ferment of the eleventh century through the deliberate use of heresy trials.³

A. P. Kazhdan takes a rather different view.⁴ He agrees that in the eleventh century Byzantium prospered. He attributes the political weakness of the empire to reactionary elements holding back the process of 'feudalization'. A. Harvey presses this approach to extremes.⁵ He insists that the advance of the great estate was essential for economic and demographic growth. Kazhdan is also struck by the buoyancy and innovation of Byzantine culture. He connects this with a growth of individualism and personal relations. It was a victory for progressive elements, which were promoted rather than hindered by the Comnenian regime.⁶

Such a bald presentation does not do justice to the subtleties and hesitations displayed by the different historians nor to their skilful deployment of the

¹ G. Ostrogorsky, *A History of the Byzantine State*, trans. J. Hussey, Oxford (1968), pp. 316–75.

² P. Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le XI^e siècle byzantin* (Le Monde Byzantin), Paris (1977), pp. 249–312.

³ R. Browning, 'Enlightenment and repression in Byzantium in the eleventh and twelfth centuries', *PaP* 69 (1975), 3–22.

⁴ A. P. Kazhdan and A. W. Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London (1985), pp. 24–73.

⁵ A. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900–1200*, Cambridge (1989), pp. 35–79.

⁶ A. P. Kazhdan and S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Cambridge (1984), pp. 242–55.

evidence. It makes their views far more schematic than they are, but it highlights differences of approach and isolates the major problems. They hinge on the effectiveness of the state. Was this being undermined by social, economic and political developments? Though their chronology is different Ostrogorsky and Lemerle are both agreed that it was. They assume that the health of Byzantium depended on the centralization of power. By way of contrast Kazhdan believes that imperial authority could be rebuilt on a different basis and this is what Alexios Komnenos was able to do. The nature of Alexios's achievement becomes the key issue.

A weakness of all these readings of Byzantium's 'eleventh-century crisis' is a willingness to take Basil II's achievement at face value; to see his reign as representing an ideal state of affairs. They forget that his iron rule represents an aberration in the exercise of imperial authority at Byzantium. His complete ascendancy was without precedent. In a series of civil wars in the early part of his reign he destroyed the power of the great Anatolian families, such as Phokas and Skleros, but only thanks to foreign aid. He used his power to straitjacket Byzantine society and subordinate it to his autocratic authority. To this end he reissued and extended the agrarian legislation of his forebears. Its purpose was ostensibly to protect peasant property from the 'powerful' as they were called. It was, in practice, less a matter of the imperial government's professed concern for the well-being of the peasantry; much more a way of assuring its tax revenues. These depended on the integrity of the village community which was the basic tax unit. This was threatened as more and more peasant property passed into the hands of the 'powerful'. Basil II followed up this measure by making the latter responsible for any arrears of taxation which had till then largely been borne by the peasantry. Control of the peasantry was vital if Basil II was to keep the empire on a war footing, while keeping the empire on a war footing was a justification for autocracy. The long war he waged against the Bulgarians only finally came to an end in 1018. It exploited the energies of the military families of Anatolia. It cowed the aristocracy of the Greek lands. They were terrified that they would be accused of cooperating with the Bulgarians. The war with the Bulgarians was bloody and exhausting, but it was a matter of recovering lost ground, not of gaining new territory. The Bulgarian lands had been annexed by John Tzimiskes in the aftermath of his victory over the Russians in 971. It was only the civil wars at the beginning of Basil II's reign and the emperor's own ineptitude that allowed the Bulgarians to recover their independence. Basil II's triumph over the Bulgarians gave a false impression of the strength of the empire.

In part, it depended on an absence of external enemies. Islam was for the time being a spent force; thanks to Byzantium's clients, the Petcheneks, conditions on the steppes were stable; the Armenians were hopelessly divided;

and western Christendom was still dazzled by Byzantium. The Russians officially converted to Orthodoxy in 989. This confirmed their passage into the Byzantine orbit. The Russians were essential to Byzantine greatness under Basil II. They provided Byzantium with soldiers and sailors. Their merchants made Constantinople the entrepôt for the products of the Russian steppes and forests and stimulated its commercial role. This was complemented by the growing presence of Venetian merchants at Constantinople. In 992 Basil II encouraged their activities by reducing the tolls on their ships paid for passage through the Hellespont to Constantinople. The effect was to favour Constantinople's role as the clearing house of Mediterranean trade. It underlined Constantinople's position as the cross-roads of the medieval world. This brought the Byzantine empire great opportunities. Constantinople was, however, disproportionately large and gave a false impression of Byzantine strength. It drew its wealth and population from well beyond the political frontiers of the Byzantine empire. Under different circumstances this might leave it vulnerable.

If forced to rely entirely on its own demographic and economic resources, Byzantium would have been condemned to the role of a regional power, at best. But it did not have to do so. The Armenian highlands were always an important recruiting ground for the Byzantine armies, but it went further than this. The Byzantine conquests in the east were followed under Byzantine auspices by Armenian colonization of Cilicia, the Euphrates provinces and northern Syria. The Russians provided another recruiting ground. Basil II relied heavily on the Varangian guard, which not only formed a *corps d'élite* but was also an instrument of his political ascendancy. Reliance on foreigners was a two-edged sword. In the course of the eleventh century relations with the Armenians deteriorated, while those with the Russians began to cool. In 1043 for reasons that must remain obscure Jaroslav the Wise, prince of Kiev, sent an expedition against Constantinople. It was easily defeated, but thereafter the Russians played a less prominent role in the affairs of the Byzantine empire. In due course, the Varangian guard would be recruited not from Russians but from exiled Anglo-Saxons. The imperial government at Constantinople lost a source of strength, which went beyond the purely military. Commercial ties with Rus' grew slacker.

When pondering the collapse of the Byzantine empire in the eleventh century, it must be remembered that Basil II left his successors a poisoned legacy. The apparent strength of the empire depended on circumstances that were beyond its control. Conditions along its frontiers might change radically. Basil II's policy of annexing the buffer territories of Bulgaria and Armenia suited his own time, but would produce real difficulties for his successors. His greatest failure, however, lay elsewhere; he neglected to make adequate provision for his succession. This was to mean that there was no settled succession to the

Byzantine throne for some seventy years until Alexios I Komnenos was securely in control.

II

Basil II never married. The understanding was that the succession would pass to his younger brother Constantine VIII, but he never produced a male heir, only daughters, of whom Zoe was Basil II's favourite. It was clear for many years before his death that succession to the Byzantine throne would go with the hand of Zoe. He considered various matches, but all were rejected, so that when he died Zoe was still a spinster. She was in her early forties and unlikely to bear children. Why Basil II was so negligent about the succession is hard to fathom. It may be that the short-term advantages of leaving the succession in doubt were too tempting. Constantine VIII (1025–8) seemed in no more of a hurry than his brother to marry off Zoe. It was only on his deathbed that he married her to Romanos Argyros (1028–34) who then succeeded in the right of his new wife. He was already somewhat elderly and unlikely to satisfy Zoe's hopes for children. Increasingly frustrated Zoe took a young lover Michael the Paphlagonian who happened to be the brother of John the Orphanotrophos, one of Basil II's eunuch ministers. Romanos died in his bath in suspicious circumstances. Michael married Zoe and duly succeeded to the throne. He was remembered as an effective emperor, but he soon fell sick. His brother John therefore sought to keep the throne within the family by persuading Zoe to adopt one of his nephews, also called Michael, as her son. He came to power in 1041, but he had no intention of being beholden to his uncle. He wished to rule as an autocrat in the style of Basil II. He drove out John the Orphanotrophos and other members of his family. He then packed Zoe off to a convent. This produced a spontaneous uprising on the part of the people of Constantinople. They did not want to be deprived of their 'Mother', as they called Zoe. The emperor was cornered and blinded. Zoe was brought back in triumph to the capital. For a few months she ruled jointly with her younger sister Theodora, who had been at the centre of opposition to the coup. She then married again, this time to Constantine Monomachos, who became the new emperor. Zoe died around 1050, so Theodora succeeded on Monomachos's death in 1055. With her death in the following year the Macedonian line came to an end, complicating the succession still further.

There is no *prima facie* reason for supposing that a troubled succession would necessarily weaken the fabric of the Byzantine state. After all, the succession was in doubt on many occasions in the tenth century, but this did not prevent Byzantium from going from strength to strength. It might be argued that frequent change of the imperial regime was a positive benefit because it made

for a greater flexibility and ability to meet critical situations. The rise to power of Romanos Lecapenus (920–44) against a background of the threat from the Bulgarian tsar Symeon or the spectacle of Nikephoros Phokas (963–9) and of John Tzimiskes (969–76) holding the throne in trust for the young Basil II are cases in point. They gave clear direction to imperial government, as did Basil II.

His death, however, was followed by a spate of conspiracies. The uncertainty of the succession provides only a partial answer. They had more to do with a rapidly changing elite. The tensions created found some release in plots against the throne. In the early tenth century the Byzantine elite was a less complicated social group than it was to become. It was divided into a military and a civilian establishment. The former was dominated by the great military families of Anatolia, while the latter could boast a handful of civil service families whose members had held office over a number of generations. The great military families went into decline from the end of the tenth century. The family of Phokas, for example, virtually disappears, but others were more fortunate: that of Skleros kept estates in Anatolia, but transferred its centre of operations to Constantinople and gradually abandoned its military traditions. Basil II relied on other families for his commanders, such as those of Dalassenos, Diogenes and the Komnenos. The fortunes of these families were made under him. The military aristocracy was becoming wider and more diffuse. The same could be said of the civilian elite. Alongside the old civil service families, there were others which had made their fortunes in trade, but had converted their wealth into status through education and the purchase of honours. There were many interests to be satisfied. Conspiracy and revolt might become necessary to satisfy supporters and clients or might simply be a gesture of political credibility.⁷

Thus instability came to be built into the political structure. Some modern historians would like to see this as a struggle between the military and civilian elites. There is some contemporary support for this interpretation, but it was a matter of continuing to apply the political divisions of a previous age, which had largely disappeared. The politics of the eleventh century were instead dominated by families that transcended these divisions. They drew their support from the whole spectrum of political society. They were often old military families that had transferred their centre of operation to Constantinople. It comes as no surprise that Romanos Argyros emerged as the successful claimant for Zoe's hand and the imperial throne. His age apart he was eminently well qualified. He came from one of the most ancient of the Anatolian military families, but one which had long been resident in Constantinople. Romanos Argyros made a career and a name for himself within the capital. He became the prefect of the City. He was also related to many of the great families of the

⁷ J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Paris (1990), pp. 157–98.

capital. These included the Monomachoi. Constantine Monomachos came from a very similar background to Romanos Argyros and was an obvious candidate for the hand of Zoe and the imperial office. He had already plotted to seize the throne from Michael IV, who was regarded as an upstart, being one of those newcomers who had recently risen to prominence. His brother a trusted agent of Basil II. There were connections with the Komnenoi. A sister married into the new wealth of Constantinople. Her husband made a fortune out of shipbuilding. It was their son who succeeded as Michael V. He was known contemptuously as the 'Caulker' by way of reference to his father's activities. The snobbery of the Constantinopolitan crowd told against him. The citizens of Constantinople brought about his downfall. Their rising may have been spontaneous, but it taught them how powerful a force they were. Thereafter emperors had to placate Constantinopolitan opinion. This was another factor making for political instability in the eleventh century. In the tenth century internal tensions could be absorbed through a policy of conquest and expansion. It became less easy after Basil II's death.

III

Basil II's immediate successors attempted to pursue his policy of expansion and annexation, but with precious little success. Large and expensive expeditions were mounted against Sicily, Syria and even Egypt. All there was to show for this costly effort was the annexation of Edessa in 1032 by George Maniakes. Against this, there was a serious revolt by the Bulgarians in 1040. Even if it was suppressed, it suggested that Basil II's conquest was not that securely based. It was a watershed: the period of expansion was over. The empire was beginning to turn in on itself. In these circumstances internal divisions would only be magnified.

Keeping the empire on a war footing may explain why after Basil II's death the imperial government was faced with increasing financial difficulties. Tax revolts were a feature of this phase of Byzantine history.⁸ Basil II must bear some of the blame. At the end of his life as an act of charity he remitted two whole years' taxation. His generosity was more than his brother could afford. The new emperor was forced to rescind the measure and collected five years' taxation within the space of three years. This caused hardship and sparked off at least one tax revolt. The next emperor Romanos Argyros instituted a laxer and more humane fiscal regime. The opening years of his reign coincided with drought and a plague of locusts in Anatolia, which forced the peasants off their land.

⁸ They are attested at Naupaktos, Nikopolis and Antioch. The Bulgarian uprising of 1040 began as a tax revolt.

They swarmed towards Constantinople. To get them to return to their native villages Romanos Argyros provided each with a donative of three *nomismata*: the rough equivalent of the tax on a substantial peasant holding. He also abandoned Basil II's practice of forcing the 'powerful' landowners to pay any arrears of taxation. Instead he farmed these out, which hints at financial difficulties. His successor Michael IV seemed equally in need of ready cash. He forced the Bulgarians to pay their taxes in coin, despite Basil II's promise that they would be taxed in kind. This action sparked off the Bulgarian revolt. Michael IV was also accused of tampering with the currency, while his brother John the Orphanotrophos exploited the state's right of monopoly over the corn trade.

Modern numismatists have reluctantly exonerated Michael IV from the charge of debasement. It was left to Constantine Monomachos to carry out a controlled debasement of the Byzantine gold coinage. It was done quite openly and deliberately. The fineness of the gold coinage was lowered by stages from twenty-four carats to eighteen. Each stage of the debasement was clearly sign-posted by the issue of different types of coin. This debasement of the coinage is a feature of the history of eleventh-century Byzantium which has attracted a great deal of attention from modern historians, because it seems to provide a key to the economic developments of the time. There are two major interpretations. The first is straightforward: debasement was a solution to a budget deficit and was a way out of the long-standing financial difficulties of the Byzantine state. The other interpretation is more sophisticated: it sees debasement as a reaction to the problems of rapid economic growth which the Byzantine empire was supposed to be experiencing in the early eleventh century.⁹ The argument goes that the Byzantine economy was as a result facing a liquidity crisis: there was not enough coinage in circulation to meet demand. Given the inelasticity of the supply of precious metals, the only solution was to debase. Admittedly, some Byzantine civil servants displayed a surprisingly advanced grasp of economics. However, even if they had an inkling that an inelastic money supply was a barrier to economic growth, they were not likely to consider this sufficient justification for debasing a coinage that had remained more or less unchanged since the days of Constantine the Great. Budgetary difficulties are surely the only explanation for the debasement carried out by Constantine Monomachos. The emperor could cite as a precedent the temporary debasement carried out by Nikephoros Phokas in the tenth century. However unpopular at the time, it had eased a period of financial embarrassment.

Even if budgetary difficulties are the explanation, debasement may still have helped to ease a liquidity problem. But was there economic growth in

⁹ C. Morrisson, 'La Dévaluation de la monnaie byzantine au XIe siècle: essai d'interprétation', *TM* 6 (1976), 3–48.

the early eleventh century on a scale sufficient to create a liquidity problem? There are certainly signs of economic growth, but they mostly relate to the Greek lands, where towns were prospering and becoming centres of trade and manufactures. Thebes, for example, became a major producer of silk, which in the tenth century had been a monopoly of the capital. There are indications that coastal trade round the Aegean was prospering and that the population of the region was growing. But this scarcely represents growth of such an order that it would have induced the imperial government to debase the gold coinage in order to increase the circulation of coinage.

In any case, it would be hard to square the financial difficulties that the imperial government faced from the death of Basil II onwards with a period of rapid economic growth. Would the state not have been the chief beneficiary, given that it imposed a VAT of 10 per cent on every commercial transaction? This ought to have gone some way towards balancing the budget. Admittedly, the continuing growth of population was not matched by a corresponding increase in the basic tax yield, since the agrarian legislation of the tenth century was applied less stringently. As significant was the extension of tax exemptions for the great estates. Blanket immunities were probably less important than preferential rates of taxation, such as those enjoyed in the eleventh century by the Athonite monasteries for their estates. This was all part of the creation of a dependent peasantry, which paid taxes and owed labour services to a lord. Ostrogorsky connected this manorialization of rural society with economic decline. He was certainly wrong, but he was correct to see it as a drain on imperial revenues.

It seems safe to assume that there was economic and demographic growth in the early eleventh century, but scarcely on a scale to create liquidity problems. Debasement was a response to the government's financial problems. Tax exemptions were partly to blame, but these were symptomatic of financial mismanagement on the part of the imperial government. Michael Psellos blamed the government's financial difficulties on the extravagance of Zoe and her consorts. This may have been a little unfair on Zoe. Dabbling in perfumes and alchemy may have been unnecessary, but was unlikely to bankrupt the state. It was at best a reflection of lax government. Zoe was not a great builder, unlike her husbands who expended colossal sums on their building activities. Romanos Argyros erected the monastery of the Peribleptos to serve as his last resting place and a memorial of his reign. Michael IV was a patron of the monastery of SS. Cosmas and Damian at Kosmidion, outside the walls of Constantinople, which he rebuilt on a lavish scale. Constantine Monomachos added the church of St George and other buildings to the Mangana complex. Accounts by later travellers provide an impression of the magnificence and scale of these churches. None of them survives; only St George

of the Mangana has been partially excavated. Its dimensions were imposing. The dome had a diameter of approximately ten metres. It therefore rivalled in size some of the Justinianic foundations.¹⁰ One of Constantine Monomachos's foundations does survive, however. This is the monastery of Nea Moni on the island of Chios. Its intricate planning and rich mosaics provide some idea of the care and money lavished on these imperial foundations. But the costs did not end with construction. Nea Moni, like St George of the Mangana, was generously endowed by the emperor.

There had not been building on this scale in the Byzantine empire since the sixth century. Emperors had mostly been content to restore the public monuments and churches inherited from the fifth and sixth centuries and to add to the Great Palace of the emperors. Basil II's main contribution had been the repair of St Sophia in 989 after it had suffered damage in an earthquake. The emperors of the eleventh century in good aristocratic fashion wanted to leave their mark on the capital through their monuments and used state revenues to this end. Again building even on the grand scale was unlikely by itself to bankrupt the state, but taken in conjunction with an extravagant court life it placed a substantial extra burden on the state's revenues. They were in any case likely to be declining because of Romanos Argyros's decision to abandon Basil II's strict control over the arrears of taxation.

Government expenditure was rising for quite another reason: the civil list was increasing dramatically as more and more honours were granted out. Michael Psellos was of the opinion that the honours system had been one of Byzantium's strengths, but was now being abused. This he singled out as one of the fundamental causes of the decline of the Byzantine state. Byzantium had developed a complicated system of honours with a double hierarchy of office and dignity. Both brought with them pensions and salaries. While sale of office was rare, sale of dignities was an accepted part of the system. If a dignity was purchased, then the holder received a pension at a standard rate. It has been calculated that this brought a return of around 3 per cent, but it was also possible to purchase at an augmented rate which brought a rather higher rate of up to 6 per cent. The state was creating a system of annuities. It almost certainly worked very well as long as it was properly supervised. The potential cost to the state was also limited by the relatively restricted number of dignities on offer. But this changed rapidly in the eleventh century as new orders of dignities were created to meet a growing demand. It was also the case that they might pass under the control of individuals who could distribute them as they saw fit. They were regarded as an investment which a father might make for

¹⁰ C. Mango, 'Les Monuments de l'architecture du XI^e siècle et leur signification historique et sociale', *TM* 6 (1976), 351–65.

his sons. Imperial largesse to monasteries sometimes took the form of a grant in perpetuity of the pensions attached to dignities. It is tempting to connect the debasement of the coinage with the inflation of honours, all the more so because of contemporary criticism of Nikephoros Phokas's earlier debasement of the coinage. One of his purposes was apparently to pay salaries and pensions in debased currency and to collect taxation in the old coinage. The temptation to debase would be all the stronger in the eleventh century as the honours system got out of hand.

However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish such a connection on a valid statistical basis. The evidence we have is anecdotal. J.-C. Cheynet discounts such evidence as unreliable.¹¹ He contends that the rate of pension for each dignity is a better guide to the costs of the honours system. The very highest dignities were always granted out sparingly. The inflation of honours affected the lesser dignities from spatharocandidate to vestarch, their pensions ranging from 36 *nomismata* to 1,008 *nomismata* or £14 of gold, which was a considerable sum, but here the argument breaks down: there is simply no way of computing the numbers of office holders. All that remains is the anecdotal evidence. Contemporaries were adamant that by the reign of Nikephoros Botaneiates (1078–81) the honours system had broken down, because the state was unable to meet the cost of the pensions involved. The honours system had bankrupted the state. Alexios I Komnenos's reform of the honours system was equally seen as an essential step towards restoring soundness to the body politic. It has to be admitted, however, that complaints about the failure of the honours system coincide with, rather than antedate, the debasement of the coinage. The two worked together to undermine the fabric of the state. The inflation of honours combined with other items of unnecessary expenditure and with other fiscal measures to cause budgetary difficulties, which led on to debasement under Constantine Monomachos. Thereafter the combination of debasement and a galloping inflation of honours ensured that the financial position would continue to deteriorate. It meant that well-conceived measures of reform had little chance of success.

IV

In the twenty-five years following Basil II's death the Byzantine empire had lost direction and momentum. The policy of military expansionism inherited from Basil II had little to commend it. Keeping the empire on a war footing was expensive. Cutting back on the armed forces was the simplest way of reducing expenditure. The Bulgarian rebellion followed almost immediately

¹¹ J.-C. Cheynet, 'Dévaluation des dignités et dévaluation monétaire dans la seconde moitié du XIe siècle', *Byzantion* 53 (1983), 453–77.

by the 1042 uprising of the citizens of Constantinople against Michael V were urgent reminders that a new approach to government was needed. The new emperor was Constantine Monomachos. He had an agenda. Military expansionism seemed out of place at a time when the empire appeared to have secure frontiers. Monomachos wished to cut back on the military establishment. To carry out his programme of reconstruction he turned to Constantine Leikhoudes and the team of clever young men he had assembled about him. These included Michael Psellos, the future Patriarch John Xiphilinos and their teacher John Mauropous. The thrust of their reforms was to strengthen the civil administration of the empire and to simplify the military organization.¹² In frontier regions the local levies were stood down and defence was left to professional troops stationed at key points. The armies of the themes continued to exist but largely on paper. Provincial administration passed increasingly from the military commander or *strategos* to a civilian governor known as the judge or the *praitor*. This had been an *ad hoc* development over the preceding fifty odd years. Constantine Monomachos regularized it by creating a new ministry at Constantinople under the *epi ton kriseon*, to which the civilian governors were now responsible. It completed a process of demilitarizing provincial government.¹³

Constantine Monomachos's propagandists presented his reforms in the guise of a *renovatio* of the empire. Imperial revivals punctuated Byzantine history. Normally, they centred on a new codification of the law. The Isaurians issued the Eclogues; the Macedonians the Basilics. Constantine Monomachos judged the Basilics to be more than adequate. What was lacking was an effective legal education. This was either picked up informally or was in the hands of the guild of notaries. Constantine Monomachos therefore instituted as the centrepiece of his reforms an imperial Law School. He placed it under the direction of a new official called the *nomophylax* and appointed John Xiphilinos as the first holder of the office. It was opened in 1047 and attached to the Mangana complex. Constantine Monomachos also created the post of Consul of the Philosophers for Michael Psellos. His duties included supervision of the schools of Constantinople. This measure was designed to bring educational establishments in the capital under more effective government control. Education was at the heart of Constantine Monomachos's reforms.¹⁴

However admirable, Constantine's reform programme had to be abandoned. It offended too many existing interests. John Xiphilinos found himself

¹² J. Lefort, 'Rhétorique et politique: trois discours de Jean Mauropous en 1047', *TM* 6 (1976), 265–303.

¹³ N. Oikonomides, 'L'Evolution de l'organisation administrative de l'empire byzantin au XIe siècle (1025–1118)', *TM* 6 (1976), 125–52.

¹⁴ W. Conus-Wolska, 'Les Ecoles de Psellos et de Xiphilin sous Constantin IX Monomaque', *TM* 6 (1976), 223–43.

under pressure from the legal establishment and preferred to retire to monastic seclusion on Bithynian Olympus. John Mauropous was appointed bishop of Euchaita in deepest Anatolia. He treated this as a form of exile, which indeed it was. At the same time, the political conditions along Byzantium's borders were changing rapidly. The Petcheneks were dislodged from the Russian steppe by Uze tribesmen from further east. In the winter of 1046/7 the main body of Petcheneks crossed the Danube, seeking refuge on Byzantine soil. It was reminiscent of the Visigoths seven centuries earlier. The settlement of the Petcheneks was equally mishandled. Constantine Monomachos was forced to send out a series of expeditions to pacify them. They had little success. The upshot was that the Petcheneks were left in possession of large tracts of the Balkans. At almost exactly the same time the Seljuq Turks began to make their presence felt along the eastern frontier. In 1048 they laid siege to Ani, the Armenian capital, which had recently been annexed by the Byzantines. The Turks might have been thwarted on this occasion, but it was a taste of things to come. The tide was also turning against Byzantium in southern Italy, as Norman freebooters harried Byzantine territories from their base at Melfi where they had established themselves in 1041.

The rapidly changing conditions in the empire's frontier provinces meant that Constantine Monomachos had to improvise. Experience had taught him that they were danger zones. They had been the launching pad for the two most serious revolts he had to face. The first came early in his reign and was the work of George Maniakes who had been sent as viceroy to Byzantine Italy by Michael V. He was suspicious of the new regime, if only because his great enemy Romanos Skleros was close to Constantine Monomachos. He crossed over to Albania in 1043 and advanced on Thessalonica down the Via Egnatia. His troops brushed aside the imperial armies sent to oppose him, but in the hour of victory he was mysteriously killed and the revolt fizzled out. The centre of the other revolt was Adrianople, which was the major military base of the southern Balkans. Its leader was Leo Tornikios, a nephew of the emperor. In the autumn of 1047 he advanced on Constantinople. It was only the emperor's coolness which saved the day. There are good reasons to suppose that underlying this revolt was dissatisfaction on the part of the military families of Adrianople with Constantine Monomachos's policies. The emperor was cutting back on military expenditure at a time when he was recruiting detachments of Petcheneks to serve on the eastern frontier.

Constantine Monomachos had to devise some way of neutralizing the danger from discontented generals. In southern Italy he turned to a local leader called Argyros, who despite his Greek name was a Lombard. He had seized the city of Bari in 1040 and had proclaimed himself 'prince and duke of Italy', but he had opposed Maniakes's rebellion. Constantine Monomachos was grateful

and brought him and his family to Constantinople. Argyros again proved his loyalty to the emperor in 1047 when he helped defend Constantinople against Tornikios. In 1051 Monomachos sent him to Italy as viceroy. This appointment showed that Monomachos was willing to work through the local elites, rather than rely on Byzantine governors. This seemed to offer two advantages. It should have reconciled local opinion to rule from Constantinople. It should also have led to some relaxation of the grip exerted by the imperial administration. This may have been deliberate. The changing political conditions along the Byzantine frontiers would have alerted the imperial government to one of the disadvantages of the military expansionism espoused by Basil II. Byzantium was left exposed to new forces gathering strength beyond its frontiers. It would have underlined the value of creating buffer states. Byzantium had been more secure when protected by independent territories in Bulgaria and Armenia, however irksome they could seem at times. By working through Argyros, Monomachos seems to have been trying to shed some of the responsibilities for frontier defence which now burdened the imperial government at Constantinople. He seems to have been trying to do something of the same kind in the Balkans and Anatolia with his attempts to settle Petcheneks and Armenians. But these efforts were mismanaged and only produced friction with the local population. Disengagement is always one of the most difficult political feats to carry off.

Constantine Monomachos's reign was pivotal. It is scarcely any wonder that later contemporaries unanimously blamed him for the disasters suffered by the empire later on in the eleventh century. He had a programme for the restoration of the empire and it failed. The programme was well conceived, but was not able to survive a combination of internal opposition and changes occurring along the empire's frontiers. Its failure left the empire adrift. Monomachos dismissed Leikhoudes, the architect of his reforms. His last years were characterized by an oppressive fiscal regime in a vain effort to restore the empire's financial situation.

v

In modern historical writing the schism of 1054 dominates the end of Monomachos's reign. It had little impact at the time, but it was important for the future, because it underlined the unbridgeable gulf that was developing between Byzantium and the west. The background to the schism was paradoxically an alliance between the Byzantine emperor and Pope Leo IX (1049–54). It was directed against the Normans and had been engineered by Argyros. There was an assumption on the part of the papacy that this alliance would promote its claims to jurisdiction over the church in Byzantine Italy. In 1053 the papal

forces made contact with the Normans near Civitate. They were expecting to link up with a Byzantine army under Argyros, but it failed to appear. The Normans trounced the papal army and captured Leo IX. This did not prevent him from despatching a delegation to Constantinople in the autumn of 1053 to renew the Byzantine alliance. It was headed by Humbert, cardinal priest of Silva Candida, chief ideologue of the reformed papacy and Leo IX's trusted adviser. By the time the papal legation reached Constantinople the pope was dead, but its members carried on regardless, acting as though their commissions were still valid.

Constantine Monomachos gave them much encouragement: the alliance with the papacy remained vital for his Italian policy. Cardinal Humbert followed the instructions he had received from Leo IX. The alliance was to be cemented by a regularization of relations between the two churches, which had not been in communion for nearly half a century. For once the discussion did not revolve around the addition of the *filioque* to the Latin creed, but around the Latin use of unleavened bread or azymes in the communion service. The patriarch of the day Michael Keroularios condemned it as a Jewish practice and argued that the Byzantine use of leavened bread had the support of the gospels. Leo IX took exception to this and wanted the question resolved. Cardinal Humbert tried to carry out his wishes, but it was difficult because Keroularios refused to acknowledge his presence. Humbert treated this as contumacy. On 16 July 1054 he entered St Sophia with the other papal legates and deposited a bull of excommunication directed at Michael Keroularios on the altar. The patriarch in his turn placed Humbert and the rest of the papal delegation under anathema. It confirmed an already existing state of schism between the two churches.

What stance did Constantine Monomachos adopt? From the outset he worked for an accord between the two churches. The papal legates came under his protection. He organized two debates between Humbert and a representative of the Orthodox church, designed to clarify the issues separating the two churches. They were conducted in an irenic fashion. Constantine Monomachos was as frustrated as the papal legates by Keroularios's lack of cooperation. This does not mean that he would have encouraged Humbert to excommunicate the patriarch. The legates' hasty departure from the city suggests that Constantine Monomachos had not approved their action. Michael Keroularios insisted that the papal legates should be brought back to Constantinople. The emperor demurred, but the patriarch used popular indignation to get his way. The legates were reprimanded, but punishment was reserved for the interpreters and members of Argyros's immediate family, who happened to be resident in the capital. Michael Keroularios blamed the incident on Argyros who was a personal enemy. He accused him of deliberately misinforming the

papacy. By singling out Argyros as the main culprit, Keroularios played down the religious issues. There were still hopes that the differences between the two churches might be solved, or so it seemed to one of the legates, Frederick of Lorraine, who in 1057 became Pope Stephen IX. He almost immediately despatched a delegation to Constantinople to repair the damage, but it never reached its destination because he died soon after it set out. Other counsels prevailed at Rome. In 1059 the new pope Nicholas II turned for support to the Normans. By this time the events of 1054 had forced a reassessment of papal interests. These were now seen to be better served by an alliance with the Normans rather than with the Byzantines. It was a momentous change which profoundly affected western relations with Byzantium.

VI

At Byzantium the events of 1054 gave Michael Keroularios a prominence which up until then he had neither enjoyed nor sought. His understanding with the people of Constantinople gave him immense power. He was on bad terms with the empress Theodora. He openly objected to a woman ruling the empire. On her deathbed she nominated Michael Stratiotikos to succeed her. He came from a distinguished civil service family.¹⁵ He was old and was intended as a figurehead for a faction among the bureaucracy which had come to power with Theodora. The new government dealt generously with potential supporters in the capital, but pleaded poverty when the generals Isaac Komnenos and Kekavmenos Katakalon came seeking promotion and donatives. They were sent packing to their estates in Anatolia. They raised the standard of rebellion and defeated the imperial forces sent against them in a particularly bloody encounter not far from the city of Nicaea. The rebels advanced on Constantinople. Within the capital there was a struggle for power between various factions. Michael Stratiotikos hoped to keep the throne by using the good offices of Constantine Leikhoudes and Michael Psellos, who had been absent from the political scene and had not crossed the generals. The emperor sent them to the rebels' camp. They were to offer Isaac Komnenos the rank of Caesar and eventual succession to the throne. But Michael Keroularios had already taken things into his own hands by having Isaac Komnenos proclaimed emperor in St Sophia. Michael Stratiotikos backed down. He was not willing to turn Constantinople into a bloodbath by opposing the entry of Isaac Komnenos's troops. Isaac Komnenos owed the throne to Michael Keroularios. The patriarch's reward was the right to appoint to the two most senior posts of the patriarchal administration: those of the *oikonomos* and the *skeuophylax*, appointments which in the past had been

¹⁵ Bringas.

in the imperial gift. It marked an important stage in the emancipation of the patriarchal administration from imperial control.

Isaac Komnenos did not wish to be beholden to the patriarch. He had been impressed by the way Michael Psellos had conducted negotiations, even if they had had no concrete result. He struck him as a man he could trust! He needed an experienced minister to supervise his plans for financial retrenchment. Arrears of taxation were chased up; pensions paid to officials were reduced; grants of property made from the imperial demesne were revoked; and there were restrictions on grants to monasteries in line with the anti-monastic legislation of Nikephoros Phokas. Isaac Komnenos's intentions were made plain by the iconography of his coinage. It showed the emperor holding an unsheathed sword. He had come to restore the military might of the empire. The essential first step was to impose order on the state's finances. In theory, Michael Psellos approved, but he thought that Isaac Komnenos acted too abruptly. His harshness alienated too many vested interests.

It aroused the opposition of the patriarch Michael Keroularios. Isaac Komnenos chose to see this as a challenge to his imperial authority. Michael Psellos claimed that 'the patriarch kept insisting on the superiority of the patriarchal dignity'. The clash of Michael Keroularios and Isaac Komnenos was a *cause célèbre* of the eleventh century. It did raise constitutional issues. Keroularios assumed the role of the moral arbiter, who could discipline emperors if they failed to protect orthodoxy or who could decide the succession when this was in doubt. He had popular support which he exploited. This laid him open to the charge that he was flirting with democracy. This accusation reflected the uncertainties created by the end of the Macedonian line and for the time being of dynamic succession. This produced a debate on the constitutional niceties of selecting an emperor. Michael Psellos looked back to the Augustan settlement for guidance. He recognized that imperial authority rested on three factors: the people, the senate and the army. He objected to the accession of Michael Stratiotikos on the grounds that he only obtained the consent of the people and the senate, but not that of the army. His charge against Michael Keroularios was that he was using the voice of the people to transfer power from one emperor to another. The constitutional role of the people of Constantinople – the New Rome – was never very clear. Their acclamation of a new emperor was one – some would claim, in accordance with Roman practice, the most important – of the constitutive acts in the making of an emperor. The people might on occasion rise up against an emperor, as happened with Michael V. This could be construed as a right to remove tyrants. Another constitutive act was the coronation, which in a period of great political confusion gave the patriarch considerable leverage. Keroularios exploited the constitutional difficulties produced by the end of the Macedonian dynasty; he sought to turn the patriarch into the arbiter of the constitution. This was seen by Michael Psellos

as a threat to imperial authority. Under his prompting Isaac Komnenos exiled Keroularios from Constantinople. Michael Psellos was put in charge of the prosecution, but his speech against Keroularios was never delivered, because the patriarch died before he could be brought to trial.¹⁶

Psellos's evident dislike of the patriarch was something more than a clash of personalities. The two men stood for very different ways of life. Psellos accused the patriarch of being an adept of the mysticism which was then fashionable in some Constantinopolitan circles. It centred on the cult of St Symeon the New Theologian.¹⁷ Its promoter was Niketas Stethatos, a future abbot of the monastery of St John Stoudios. Keroularios supported his campaign for the canonization of St Symeon the New Theologian. His teachings provided some of the inspiration behind the monastic revival, now associated with the monastery of the Theotokos Euergetis, which was gathering strength at Constantinople.

Psellos spelt out the dangers of mysticism. It exalted ignorance and denied human reason. It was divorced from everyday life. Psellos, for his part, gloried in his own humanity: 'I am an earthly being', he told the patriarch, 'made of flesh and blood, so that my illnesses seem to me to be illnesses, blows blows, joy joy.'¹⁸ Psellos came close to admitting that he believed that 'man was the measure of all things'. He certainly emphasized the primacy of human experience. He saw no contradiction between Christianity and life in society. Had not Christ often frequented the market places and much less frequently the mountains? Psellos was preaching a Christian humanism. Society was held together by the bonds of a Christian faith, friendship and reason. It possessed its own logic and justification. However, it was shaped and guided by the 'philosopher' Psellos set his authority as 'philosopher' on the same level as that of the patriarch. If he did not challenge imperial authority quite so directly, his *Chronographia* dwells on the human frailties of individual emperors. Its message is that without the wisdom of a 'philosopher' to guide him an emperor was incapable of living up to the responsibilities of his office. Niketas Stethatos was less circumspect in his promotion of the mystic. He exalted the primacy of the mystic over 'emperor, patriarch, bishop, or priest'.¹⁹

The emphasis on the role of the mystic and the 'philosopher' devalued traditional authority at Byzantium. They had access to 'knowledge' that was of immediate benefit to a Christian society. Mystical experience opened up direct access to the Godhead. St Symeon the New Theologian saw this as a guarantee that Christ's ministry was ever present and not set in some distant past. Psellos

¹⁶ Died 21 January 1059. ¹⁷ Died 12 March 1022.

¹⁸ K. N. Sathas, *Mesaionike Bibliothēke (Bibliotheca graeca medii aevi)*, v, Venice and Paris (1876), p. 232.

¹⁹ I. Hausherr, *Un grand mystique byzantin: vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien (949–1022) par Nicétas Stéthatos*, Rome (1928), p. lxxvi.

had the harder task of explaining the relevance of classical learning in a Christian society. He was not simply content with the traditional justification that it was an educational tool: one that provided a means of cultivating human reason. Learning made possible an understanding of the natural world, which offered clues to God's existence and purpose. Psellos sought to build on the classical heritage and bring it up to date. His letters and rhetorical works are not redolent of the drab encyclopaedism of the previous century, but are full of emotion and concrete detail. Unlike earlier Byzantine histories, his *Chronographia* is not dominated by the workings of Divine Providence, but emphasizes instead the human element as a decisive historical factor. Psellos did not see any contradiction between Christianity and the classical tradition; to his way of thinking the former fulfilled the latter. He liked to think of himself as in the tradition of the Cappadocian Fathers who used their profound knowledge of Greek philosophy to deepen understanding of their Christian faith. Psellos never grappled with theology in any systematic way. This task was left to his pupil John Italos, who reopened many of the basic questions of Christian dogma.

The work of John Italos was just one more sign of the cultural vitality of the eleventh century. Its origins lie in a reaction to the repressive official culture of the tenth century. The decline of imperial prestige raised basic questions about the ordering of a Christian society. The rivalry of mystic and humanist will sometimes have sharpened the edge of debate, but not all agreed with Michael Psellos that they were diametrically opposed. Most saw their approaches as complementary.²⁰ They gave a new breadth to Byzantine culture. Equally, the claims of mystic and humanist were subversive of traditional authority at Byzantium. Some of the strongest social ties were those that formed around them among their followers. In this way, they gave a Christian society a degree of independence of the hierarchical authority exercised by emperor and patriarch. The exchanges between Michael Psellos and Michael Keroularios revealed how traditional assumptions about the ordering of Byzantine life were being reassessed. They raised constitutional, political, social and intellectual issues. Cultural flux mirrored political uncertainties.

VII

The attack on Michael Keroularios lost Isaac Komnenos a good deal of support. Michael Psellos saw which way the wind was blowing. He persuaded the emperor to resign at a time when a bout of illness had left him in a state of depression. The new emperor was Constantine Doukas who happened to be married to a niece of the patriarch. It was an admission among other things that the

²⁰ J. M. Hussey, *Ascetics and Humanists in Eleventh-Century Byzantium*, London (1960).

reforms initiated by Isaac Komnenos and supervised by Michael Psellos were not working. Constantine Doukas immediately repealed them. He restored honours to those who had been deprived of them. Constantine Doukas set out his programme in a speech he delivered before the guilds of Constantinople. He emphasized that truth and justice, and not the sword, were to be the keynotes of his reign. It was a return to the policies that had been tried at the beginning of Constantine Monomachos's reign. Constantine Doukas was sensible enough to dispense with Michael Psellos's political services. Less wise was his decision to appoint Psellos tutor to his son and heir Michael Doukas. Contemporaries were unanimous that this rendered the latter unfit to rule!

Constantine X Doukas (1059–67) had to all appearances a remarkably successful reign. He was well fitted to be emperor. He had good connections with both the military families of Anatolia and the great families of Constantinople. He also anticipated the future in the way he associated his family in government. He relied heavily on the support of his brother John, whom he raised to the rank of Caesar. He was later criticized for the overgenerous way in which he distributed honours and pensions to the people of Constantinople and for the way he allowed the military establishment to run down. There was increasing pressure on the frontiers of the empire. The Normans made significant advances in the south of Italy in the wake of their alliance with the papacy in 1059, but Constantine Doukas reacted energetically: he despatched a number of expeditions to secure the main Byzantine bases along the Adriatic coast. He himself led the army that mopped up a Uze invasion of the Balkans. Less was done on the eastern frontier. The defences of Melitene were rebuilt in 1063, but Ani – the Armenian capital – was lost to the Seljuqs the next year. Its importance was always more symbolic than strategic. Constantine Doukas will not have heard of the sack of Cappadocian Caesarea and the desecration of the cathedral of St Basil which occurred around the time of his death in May 1067. Only an emperor as securely in control as he was could adopt the strategy he did in the east. It was a war of attrition. He aimed to hold the key positions and allow the eastern provinces to absorb Turkish pressure. There was increasing agitation for a more aggressive policy.

In the normal course of events Constantine Doukas would have been succeeded by his son Michael, who was aged about sixteen, but he was already seen as something of a liability. Constantine therefore left the regency to his empress Eudocia Makrembolitissa.²¹ But she was forced to swear on oath never again to marry. She also undertook to rule with the aid of the Caesar John Doukas, until Michael Doukas was capable of carrying out the duties of an emperor. In good

²¹ N. Oikonomides, 'Le Serment de l'impératrice Eudocie (1067): un épisode de l'histoire dynastique de Byzance', *REB* 21 (1963), 101–28.

dynastic fashion Constantine Doukas was trying to safeguard the succession for his family. The oath was administered by the patriarch John Xiphilinos. He was soon persuaded that the common interest required that Eudocia should be released from her oath. This allowed her to marry Romanos Diogenes, who was the head of a powerful Anatolian family. He came to the throne on the understanding that he would respect the eventual succession of Michael Doukas.

The chances of this happening became increasingly remote as Eudocia bore her new husband two sons in quick succession. Romanos needed a decisive victory in order to establish himself and his line in power. His efforts to search out and destroy the Turkish bands of marauders left him open to ridicule. They were far too nimble for the lumbering and badly trained troops that he had at his disposal. He changed his strategy. Instead of waiting for the Turks to invade the Byzantine provinces, he decided to engage them at their major point of entry into Byzantine territory. This was the bottleneck to the north of Lake Van, which was commanded by the fortress of Manzikert. In the summer of 1071 Romanos Diogenes led all the troops he could muster to Lake Van. He recovered possession of Manzikert and other strategic points which had been lost to the Turks. The emperor appears not to have known that the Seljuq sultan Alp Arslan was also operating in the area. Once he had learned of the sultan's presence he determined to engage him in battle. It was an opportunity too good to miss. The battle lasted two days. The Byzantines fought with surprising tenacity and discipline. They had the better of the battle until towards evening on the second day a rumour started to spread that Romanos had fallen. This was the work of Andronikos Doukas, a son of the Caesar John Doukas. His motives were political. If Romanos emerged from the battle with credit, the Doukas cause was doomed. Andronikos Doukas was in command of the rearguard and in a position to do maximum damage. He abandoned the field leaving Romanos and his elite troops unprotected. They had fought bravely, but they were now quickly surrounded by the Turks and the emperor was captured.

In military terms Manzikert was not a disaster.²² The Byzantine casualties were relatively slight. It should only have confirmed Turkish domination of the Armenian highlands, not that almost the whole of Anatolia would be overrun by the Turks within ten years. Early Turkish settlement was concentrated a thousand miles to the west of Manzikert along the northern and western rims of the Anatolian plateau. Why should a defeat at the extreme limit of Byzantium's eastern frontiers have opened up Anatolia to Turkish settlement? Part of the answer is weight of numbers. The Turks were a people on the move seeking new

²² J.-C. Cheynet, 'Manzikert: un désastre militaire?', *Byzantion* 50 (1980), 410–38.

pastures. But their penetration of the Byzantine empire was facilitated by the civil wars sparked off by the defeat at Manzikert. Partisans of the Doukas cause at Constantinople, including Michael Psellos, seized control of the government for Michael Doukas. Romanos had not, however, been killed in the battle, as rumour suggested. He was soon released by the sultan. He made his base at Amaseia and rallied his supporters. Defeated by an army despatched from Constantinople, he retreated to Antioch. The next year 1072 he was again defeated by an army sent out from the capital. It was commanded by Andronikos Doukas and consisted largely of Frankish mercenaries. Romanos was captured and taken back under safeconduct. As they were approaching Constantinople the order came that he was to be blinded. This was done so savagely that he died a few weeks later on 4 August 1072. The year of civil war had given the Turks an opportunity to exploit their victory, but it did not end there.

Russell Balliol, a Norman mercenary in Byzantine service, seized the main chance. He had taken part in the opening stages of the Norman conquest of Sicily. He recognized a similar opportunity in the confusion produced by the aftermath of Manzikert. He made Amaseia his centre of operations and soon brought most of the old theme of Armeniakon under his control. Local people welcomed his presence because he offered some protection from the marauding Turks. The government at Constantinople took the threat from Russell Balliol much more seriously than that presented by the Turks. Its apprehension increased when Balliol captured the Caesar John Doukas who had been sent with an army against him. Balliol proclaimed the Caesar emperor and advanced towards Constantinople. The Doukas government brought in Turks as the only way of combating the Norman. In the short term it worked. Balliol was defeated, but managed to get back to Amaseia, where he retained his independence. In retrospect, the use of Turks was a miscalculation on the part of the Byzantine government, but at the time the Turks seemed no kind of threat to Constantinople. Cocooned in the capital, Michael Doukas and his advisers may well have felt that the Turks could be treated like the Petcheneks in the Balkans: given lands and a degree of tribal autonomy and in due course absorbed within Byzantine government and society.

Eventually the young Alexios Komnenos was sent to deal with Russell Balliol. It was his first major commission. With the help of a local Turkish chieftain he managed to apprehend the Norman and take him back to Constantinople. He acquitted himself with great skill and assurance, but the result was that a large part of northern Anatolia fell under Turkish domination. Alexios Komnenos had the greatest difficulty in extricating himself and his prisoner from Amaseia because the whole country was alive with Turks. He made a detour to Kastamon where he expected a friendly reception, since it was the centre of his family's estates. He found instead his grandfather's palace occupied by Turks and he

had to hurry on. This incident reveals how swiftly Byzantine control in the region collapsed. It was largely because of a lack of local leadership.

The story was much the same in other parts of Anatolia. In 1077 Nikephoros Botaneiates – a noted general – abandoned his estates in western Asia Minor and marched on Constantinople with his retinue of 300 men. He left the area unprotected. Still worse he engaged the services of a Turkish chieftain. His name was Suleiman. Botaneiates seems to have been unaware that he was no ordinary warband leader, but a scion of the ruling Seljuq dynasty. He had been sent from Baghdad to take control of the haphazard and quite unexpected Turkish conquest of Anatolia. In return for his aid Botaneiates surrendered into his safekeeping the strongly fortified city of Nicaea, scarcely fifty miles as the crow flies from Constantinople. Suleiman set about turning this city into a centre of Seljuq rule. It was a colossal miscalculation on Botaneiates's part, though he might not otherwise have overthrown Michael VII Doukas and become emperor. He in his turn would have to face a challenge which compounded his own folly. Nikephoros Melissenos raised the standard of revolt on the island of Cos. He too turned to the Turks for support. The price was the surrender of cities along the western coast of Asia Minor, such as Smyrna.

A succession of revolts and civil wars had dragged the Turks westward to the shores of the Aegean and had handed them control of most of the great cities of Asia Minor. Thus was the fate of Byzantine Anatolia sealed! The Turks established themselves in force on the northern and western edges of the Anatolian plateau. It proved impossible to dislodge them. Behind this shield the much slower process whereby Byzantine Anatolia was transformed into Turkey could go on more or less unhindered. In retrospect, the loss of Anatolia to the Turks seems to have been folly on a grand scale.

VIII

The emperor Nikephoros Botaneiates was an old hero, but was incapable of mastering circumstances that were spinning out of control. As if the loss of Anatolia was not bad enough, Robert Guiscard, the Norman leader, was massing his forces in southern Italy for an invasion. The commander of Byzantium's western armies was now Alexios Komnenos, but his abilities, ambition and family connections marked him out as a threat to the regime in Constantinople. The young commander found himself in an impossible position. He struck in the spring of 1081. On 1 April 1081 Alexios with the help of his brother Isaac and the support of the Caesar John Doukas seized Constantinople and overthrew the old emperor.

In the meantime Robert Guiscard and his son Bohemond had crossed to Albania and laid siege to Durazzo at the head of the Via Egnatia. Guiscard

justified his actions by proclaiming that he was coming to restore to the throne of Constantinople the rightful house of Doukas. These dynastic pretensions made him all the more dangerous at a time when the new emperor's hold on power was still shaky. Alexios assembled all available forces and made for Durazzo, only to suffer a shattering defeat. His troops were no match for the Normans. In military terms it was a far more serious defeat than Manzikert. While one Norman army advanced down the Via Egnatia to within striking distance of Thessalonica, another under Bohemond headed south into Greece. The key position was Larissa in Thessaly. If it fell to the Normans, then the rich provinces of Hellas and the Peloponnese were lost. With a scratch force of Turkish archers Alexios marched in 1083 to the relief of Larissa. The emperor was careful not to engage the Normans in open battle. He relied instead on skirmishing tactics. He was able to raise the siege of Larissa and forced the Normans to evacuate Thessaly. The Norman threat only ended with the death of Robert Guiscard in 1085, which was followed by a succession crisis in southern Italy and the withdrawal of the Normans from their bases in Albania and the Ionian islands.

More by luck than good judgement Alexios emerged from the first test of his reign with his reputation enhanced. His next task was to restore the Danubian frontier. The key this time was the fortress city of Dristra. This was under the control of the Petcheneks, who in 1087 caught Alexios by surprise. Yet another Byzantine army was lost. Once again Alexios was lucky to escape. The Petcheneks pushed south towards Constantinople. The danger was even more serious because they allied with Tzachas, a Turkish amir who had turned Smyrna into a pirate base. By the winter of 1090–1 Alexios controlled little more than Constantinople itself. He had no army to speak of. The force that he led out against the Petcheneks consisted very largely of the retainers of his relatives and supporters. He headed for the port of Ainos at the mouth of the Hebrus (Maritsa), in the hope of preventing the Petcheneks from linking up with their Turkish ally. The situation was further complicated by the appearance of another nomadic people – the Cumans – who had crossed over the Danube into the Balkans. Their original intention was to cooperate with the Petcheneks. Alexios succeeded in winning them over to the Byzantine side. Thanks largely to their help Alexios crushed the Petcheneks at the battle of Mount Levounion in Thrace. The Petcheneks ceased to count. The Cumans were still a potential threat to Byzantine control of the Balkans, but in 1094 Alexios defeated them outside the walls of Ankhialos on the Black Sea. At long last, Alexios was in full control of the Danubian frontier.

Alexios displayed great tenacity in the face of a series of military defeats. But this cannot disguise the fact that they were often of his own making. It was largely his own foolhardiness which had jeopardized Byzantine control of the Balkans. Without the support of his family it is doubtful whether he could have

survived his early years as emperor, so patchy was his military record. Alexios had, however, wisely trusted the running of the government to his mother Anna Dalassena. While he was campaigning she kept control of Constantinople and managed to meet his military requirements. This necessitated a harsh administrative regime.

Alexios's survival also depended on the support of the great families. He came to power as the leader of an aristocratic faction. His overthrow would almost certainly have meant their downfall. The Komnenoi were linked by ties of blood and marriage to all the major aristocratic families. Alexios turned this into a principle of government. He did this very largely through a radical reform of the honours system. His daughter Anna Komnena perceptively singles this out as a major achievement.²³ In the past the honours system had been hierarchical rather than dynastic: membership of the imperial family did not bring rank at court as of right. The inflation of honours over the eleventh century resulted in a collapse of the old honours system. Alexios rebuilt it by creating a series of new ranks that were reserved for members of his family. The imperial epithet *sebastos* was now accorded to the imperial family in its widest sense. The *sebastoi* became a distinct hierarchy with their own gradations. At the top came the rank of *sebastokrator* which was a conflation of *sebastos* and *autokrator*. This Alexios created for his elder brother Isaac who shared the burdens of the imperial office. The rank of *protosebastos* went to one of the emperor's brothers-in-law. It was normally combined with the position of *protovestiarios*. This too marked a profound change in the texture of government. In the past the *protovestiarios* had almost always been a eunuch and one of the chief officers of the imperial household. Alexios did away with eunuchs and created an imperial household staffed very largely by members of his family, while the more menial positions went to retainers of the house of Komnenos. The imperial household had always been the instrument for the exercise of direct imperial authority. Its identification with Comnenian family interest gave it a different quality.

In the past office and rank brought lucrative salaries. One of the attractions of reforming the honours system was that it provided a way of abolishing these profits of office. Alexios found other ways of rewarding members of his family. He granted them administrative and fiscal rights over specific areas. This was the basis of grants that were later known as *pronoiai*. In the past similar grants had been made out of the imperial demesne, but Alexios extended this principle to state lands. In a sense, he was parcelling out the empire among his family and creating a series of appanages. He rebuilt imperial government as an aristocratic connection; family business might be a more accurate description. It was a radical step which would later create tensions because the theory of

²³ Anna Komnena, *Alexiad*, bk III, ch. iv, para. 3: ed. Lieb and Gautier, I, pp. 114–15.

imperial autocracy was not revised to take account of the transformation that occurred in practice. But it provided Alexios with the strengths necessary to hold on to power during his difficult early years.

IX

There were many great families who were not included in the Comnenian circle. It was from these that the main opposition to Alexios's regime came. Those with most to lose were the senatorial families which had run the administration under the Doukai. The underlying current of hostility that existed between them and the Komnenoi surfaced during Alexios's seizure of Constantinople. We are told that his supporters deliberately set upon any senators they came across in the streets. The patriarch Cosmas forced Alexios and members of his family to do public penance for the violence that was a feature of their seizure of power. It was one more demonstration of the moral authority of the patriarch, which was such a powerful factor in the politics of eleventh-century Byzantium. It was a deliberate humiliation of the imperial family. Alexios's reaction showed his metal: he procured the dismissal of the patriarch and replaced him by Eustratios Garidas, a monk cultivated by his mother. It revealed how ruthless he could be, but it earned him the hostility of a powerful section of the clergy led by Leo, bishop of Chalcedon. Leo objected to the way that Alexios had seized church treasures in order to pay for his first campaign against the Normans. It was an action for which there were good precedents. It was, in other words, chosen as a suitable issue through which to attack the emperor. Garidas was not strong enough to defend either himself or the emperor and was replaced in 1084 by Nicholas Grammatikos. Leo of Chalcedon switched the attack to the new patriarch, but Alexios Komnenos was now sufficiently sure of himself to have Leo exiled.

The emperor's new confidence owed much to the successful outcome of the trial of John Italos on a charge of heresy. John Italos had been a leading figure at the court of Michael VII Doukas, who entrusted him with negotiations with Robert Guiscard. He was also a teacher of note. He had succeeded Michael Psellos as Consul of the Philosophers and took over his responsibilities for the supervision of education in the capital. Unlike Psellos his bias was towards Aristotle rather than Plato. His application of philosophical method to theological questions earned him an enthusiastic following but also laid him open like Psellos before him to charges of heresy. Michael VII Doukas encouraged him to submit a profession of faith to the patriarch Cosmas as a way of exonerating himself. The patriarch demurred; and there the matter rested.

The case was reopened by the Comnenian regime in the winter of 1081–2, when its stock at Constantinople was very low following Alexios's defeat at the

hands of the Normans. Italos numbered among his former pupils members of prominent Constantinopolitan families who were seen by the Komnenoi as potential centres of opposition to their rule. If successful, an attack on Italos would help to discredit them. After a preliminary hearing before the emperor Italos was passed over to the patriarch, so that his case could come before the patriarchal synod. It duly convened in the church of St Sophia. There was a good chance that Italos would be acquitted, because feeling among the bishops was beginning to turn against the Komnenoi. Before this could happen a mob broke into St Sophia and hunted Italos down. He escaped by hiding on the roof of the Great Church. The patriarch was out of his depth and handed matters back to the emperor, who had Italos condemned as a heretic. On the feast of Orthodoxy, which in 1082 fell on 13 March, Italos publicly abjured his errors.

The trial of John Italos was a significant episode. It allowed Alexios Komnenos to establish an ascendancy over the Orthodox church. There were three distinct strands to this process. The first was his use of the mob. The Constantinopolitan mob had proved itself over the eleventh century to be a significant political factor. But it was normally mobilized in support of the church. Now Alexios was able to win it over to his side and deploy it against the church. How and why he was able to do this has to remain a matter of speculation. The most likely explanation is that the mob responded to Alexios's pose as the guardian of Orthodoxy. This receives some support from the timing of Italos's condemnation to coincide with the feast of Orthodoxy. This was a celebration of the victory over iconoclasm in 843. It was the occasion on which the *synodikon* of Orthodoxy was read out. This was a statement of faith condemning heresy in general and iconoclasm, in particular. It had remained virtually unchanged from 843 down to the eleventh century. It was Alexios who hit upon the device of bringing it up to date by adding to it the condemnation of John Italos and, as his reign progressed, that of others condemned for heresy. It was a concrete expression of the emperor's role as the guardian of Orthodoxy.

Alexios was not content with the condemnation of Italos alone. He also pursued his pupils. They were forbidden to teach. They remained under the shadow of their master's condemnation for heresy. This had two consequences. The first was that it discredited members of families potentially opposed to the Komnenoi. The second paradoxically was a rapprochement with the clergy of the patriarchal church. Among Italos's most prominent pupils were a number of deacons of St Sophia. Induced to disown their master, they were not only reconciled with the church, but were also permitted to continue teaching. One of them was Eustratios, the future bishop of Nicaea, who was soon to become Alexios's most trusted religious adviser. An understanding with the patriarchal clergy was useful to the emperor because at Synod they constituted a counterweight to the episcopal presence. Alexios acted to guarantee the privileges of the

patriarchal clergy. He also issued a chrysobull defining the privileges and role of the *chartophylax* of St Sophia. It upheld the precedence of the *chartophylax* over bishops on the grounds that he was the patriarch's deputy. In practice, the holder of the office came to oversee the patriarchal administration. This was much to the advantage of the emperor because he still retained appointment to this office.

Alexios's measures went a long way towards neutralizing the independence of action which the eleventh-century patriarchs had displayed. They had, for instance, assumed the initiative over marriage legislation and litigation. This produced differences between canon and civil law. Alexios intervened to reestablish imperial control of this important area of law. He reenacted the novel of Leo VI over the age of consent for betrothal and marriage with its important rider that the emperor could use his powers of discretion to ignore the stipulations of the novel. Having regained the initiative over legislation, he then conceded that marriage litigation should in normal circumstances go before the ecclesiastical courts.

Alexios's church settlement is among his greatest achievements – and most neglected. It enabled him to rebuild the moral and spiritual foundations of imperial authority, which had been undermined in the course of the eleventh century. He recovered control over the administration of the patriarchal church and regained the initiative in matters of legislation. He was the guarantor of the privileges or liberties of the church. He assumed the role of *epistemonarkhes* or regulator of the church, even if this title did not enter official usage until the mid-twelfth century.

Above all, beginning with the trial of John Italos he used heresy as a way of establishing his credentials as the guardian of Orthodoxy. Under Alexios the suppression of heresy became an imperial preserve. There were a series of heresy trials. They suited the image that Alexios was endeavouring to project, but there were political undercurrents. They were a means of discrediting potential opponents. The most spectacular trial for heresy was that of Basil the Bogomil and his followers. The date can only be fixed approximately to c. 1100. The Bogomil heresy originated in Bulgaria and was a form of dualism. It is impossible to establish any clear connection between the Bulgarian and Byzantine phases of Bogomilism. It is possible that they arose quite separately and spontaneously and that a connection was only perceived in retrospect. Byzantine Bogomilism had its roots in lay piety. It was transformed by Basil the Bogomil's missionary zeal. He organized his followers around his twelve disciples. It was assumed that he aimed to convert the world. It has also been suggested that he was responsible for providing Bogomilism with its theological justification: his dualist teaching transformed unease with the material world into a system of belief. Like other holy men Basil could count some

distinguished figures among his followers. He had entrée to the highest circles. There is even a suspicion that Anna Dalassena was a supporter. It would explain that comic scene so graphically sketched by Anna Komnena, which otherwise beggars belief. Alexios Komnenos and his brother Isaac interviewed Basil the Bogomil and pretended to be sympathetic to his teachings. By this means they were able to induce Basil to set out his Bogomil beliefs in full. Behind a screen a stenographer was taking down his words, which were then used against him. What distinguishes Basil from other heretics is that he also possessed a large popular following, which meant that he was doubly dangerous.

Though this was not necessarily Alexios's intention, one of the consequences of Basil's condemnation was to strengthen imperial authority on the streets of Constantinople. This is apparent from the edict Alexios issued in 1107 in the aftermath of the Bogomil trials. Its purpose was to create an order of preachers attached to St Sophia who would tackle the problem of heresy on the streets of the capital and act as the moral policemen of the different neighbourhoods. This edict shows how effective his control over the church had become. The creation of an order of preachers was originally the work of the Patriarch Nicholas Grammatikos. It was now taken over by the emperor, who also took responsibility for reorganizing the patriarchal clergy.

Nicholas Grammatikos accepted imperial ascendancy. He understood that the church benefited from the emperor's benevolent supervision. He also recognized the emperor's piety. This was best seen in his patronage of monks and monasteries. This Nicholas Grammatikos would have appreciated, because he was not only the founder of a Constantinopolitan monastery, but was also famed for his self-denial. Alexios was the heir of his mother's careful cultivation of monks and holy men. Their support had been useful during his difficult early years as emperor. He and members of his family supported the work of monastic figures, such as St Christodoulos of Patmos, Hosios Meletios and St Cyril Phileotes in the provinces. They also founded and refounded monasteries in the capital. Constantinople had been the scene of a strong current of monastic revival from the middle of the eleventh century, associated with the monastery of the Theotokos Euergetis. Its *typikon* or rule provided a guide to a series of Comnenian foundations. Monastic order also provided the inspiration for the reform of imperial court life begun by Anna Dalassena and continued by Alexios's empress Eirene Doukaina. Anna Komnena noted that under their guidance 'the palace assumed the appearance of a monastery'.²⁴ Alexios and his family became exemplars of a piety that drew its inspiration from the monastic revival that gathered strength at Constantinople from the mid-eleventh century. This went a long way towards reconciling the church to

²⁴ *Ibid.*, bk III, ch. viii, para. 2: ed. Lieb and Gautier, I, pp. 125.30–1.

the Comnenian ascendancy and gave the new dynasty a moral standing that had been denied to the emperors of the eleventh century.

The monastic revival continued, but under Comnenian auspices. This was typical of Alexios's church settlement. His main purpose was to assert imperial control. He harnessed new forces and ideas that surfaced in the eleventh century and put them at the disposal of the imperial dynasty. Alexios's patronage of monastic leaders does not mean that he was therefore hostile to humanism. If he destroyed John Italos, he rehabilitated his pupil Eustratios of Nicaea, who continued his master's work on Aristotle. The Komnenoi promoted humanist culture. Alexios's daughter Anna Komnena was one of its adornments. The *Alexiad*, her history of her father's reign, owed something to Michael Psellos, whose learning Anna much admired. She was also a patron of Eustratios of Nicaea and Aristotelian scholarship. The *sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos, who may be a brother, but is more probably a son of Alexios Komnenos, continued Michael Psellos's Neoplatonic interests. Comnenian self-interest meant that the cultural revival of the eleventh century changed its character. It lost much of its effervescence, but it might have fizzled out or the Komnenoi might have repressed it. Instead, they preserved its essentials and ensured that cultural breadth and vitality that characterizes later Byzantine history.

x

Alexios's achievement was to rebuild the Byzantine empire. The new and the traditional were mixed in equal measure. He restored the traditional role of the emperor in ecclesiastical affairs, but took it further. Caesaropapism is an apt description of his supervision of the church. Politically, Byzantium was organized on a dynastic rather than a hierarchical basis. This is perhaps where Alexios was at his most radical because it had far-reaching implications for the organization of government. It meant that the emperor shared power with members of an extended family. There was, on the other hand, no radical restructuring of government. Alexios was more interested in finding ways of exercising control. His solution was to create coordinating ministries. The civil service was now subordinated to the logothete of the *sekreta*, later known as the grand logothete; the fiscal services were placed under the control of the grand logariast.

Alexios inherited a bankrupt state. The coinage was miserably debased. The fineness of the gold coinage had been reduced from twenty-four to eight carats. So desperate was his situation that Alexios had to debase still further, but by 1092 he was able to restore some order to the coinage. He raised the fineness of a standard gold coinage to around twenty carats. He kept the debased electrum (silver/gold alloy) issues, but stabilized them at around six

carats. He also kept the debased silver coinage in the form of a billon coin with a minimal silver content. He issued a new copper coinage. Alexius's reform of the coinage was typical of the measures he took to restore the empire. He imposed order and stability, but his measures had radical consequences. Michael Hendy contends that 'the Alexian coinage reform of 1092 attempted and achieved nothing less than a complete reconstruction of the coinage system on an entirely novel basis; . . . only the Diocletianic reform had been on a similar scale.'²⁵ His innovation was to create a regular coinage based on alloys rather than pure metal. It is likely that the existence of both an electrum and a billon coinage, which took the place of the old silver *miliaresia*, made for a more flexible monetary system. But the greatest service that Alexius's coinage reform did was to reestablish clear equivalences between the different coinages. Their absence had brought chaos to the fiscal system. In the wake of his reform of the coinage Alexius was able to proceed to a thorough-going reform of the collection of taxes – the so-called *Nea Logarike*. It was essentially an adaptation of the taxation system to the reformed coinage. It has been estimated that it was done in such a way as to quadruple the tax rate.

Alexios I Komnenos ended the lax fiscal regime of the eleventh century. There are no signs that the Byzantine economy suffered. It quickly recovered from a period of dislocation which lasted for approximately twenty years from the defeat at Manzikert to Alexius's victory over the Petcheneks in 1091. The manorialization of the countryside continued with largely beneficial results for the peasantry. The towns of Greece and the southern Balkans prospered. Places such as Corinth, Thebes and Halmyros (in Thessaly) benefited from a growing Italian presence. There was an upsurge of local trade around the shores of the Aegean. Constantinople continued to be the clearing house of the medieval world. The empire was far from being 'internally played out'. But there had been a decisive shift in its centre of gravity from Asia Minor to Greece and the southern Balkans, which experienced a period of sustained economic growth. It is not clear, however, that this compensated for the loss of the resources of Anatolia. Its recovery was always Alexius's major task.

XI

By 1095 Alexios had pacified the Balkans, brought peace to the church and restored sound government. He was in a position to contemplate recovering Anatolia from the Turks. He moved troops across the Bosphorus and using Nicomedia as a base created a defensible zone, but it soon became clear that he did not have the resources to effect a reconquest of Anatolia. His preoccupation

²⁵ M. F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–1450*, Cambridge (1985), p. 513.

with Europe had given the Turks the opportunity to settle vital parts of Anatolia in depth. Alexios had made the situation still worse at the very beginning of his reign by withdrawing the remaining Byzantine garrisons from Anatolia. Paradoxically, the only area where there was potential support for a Byzantine reconquest was in the Euphrates lands and Cilicia where the Armenians had retained their independence.

Alexios needed troops. The Byzantines had long appreciated the martial qualities of the Franks, but had reason to fear their indiscipline and ambition. The main recruiting ground had been among the Normans of southern Italy, but a chance meeting in 1089 opened up a new source of Frankish cavalry. Robert I, count of Flanders, was returning overland from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He made a detour to pay his respects to Alexios Komnenos, who was then in winter quarters in Bulgaria. He offered to send Alexios a force of 500 cavalry. He sealed the bargain by taking 'the usual Latin oath' to the emperor. The count was as good as his word and the Flemish cavalry arrived the next year. They were sent to guard the area of Nicomedia, but were then evacuated in 1091 in order to take part in the campaign against the Petcheneks which culminated in the victory at Mount Levounion. They were an important addition to Alexios's forces at a critical moment in his reign. However, Alexios required more than a contingent of 500 Flemish cavalry if he was to have any chance of recovering Anatolia. He turned for help to Pope Urban II, with whom he had been conducting negotiations over the reunion of the churches. Their outcome was inconclusive, but relations remained cordial. Urban II knew that his mentor Gregory VII had tried and failed to organize a papal expedition, which was to go to the rescue of Constantinople and then to press on to Jerusalem. Whether Alexios did too is another matter, but he was well aware of the importance of Jerusalem to Latin Christians. In the spring of 1095 Urban II held a council at Piacenza. Byzantine envoys were present and made a plea for papal aid against the Seljuqs. The exact terms in which this plea was couched cannot now be recovered. Urban II then held a council at Clermont in November 1095, where he made an appeal to the knighthood of France for an expedition to go to the rescue of eastern Christendom. The pope linked this with pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the attendant spiritual rewards. He fixed 15 August 1096 as the day of departure for Constantinople which was to be the point of assembly.

The passage of the crusade was to present Alexios with huge problems. The numbers are not easy to estimate. Modern calculations vary from 30,000 to 70,000 soldiers; over 100,000 if non-combatants are included. The first contingents started to arrive in the early summer of 1096 with Peter the Hermit. They were perhaps less of a rabble than Anna Komnena would have us believe. The swiftness of their arrival took Alexios by surprise. He shipped them over to

Asia Minor, where many of them were killed by the Turks. Alexios was better prepared for the crusading armies that followed in the autumn and winter of 1096. These were under the command of western princes, such as the dukes of Normandy and Lower Lorraine, the counts of Toulouse, Blois, Vermandois and Flanders, and worryingly the Norman Bohemond. Alexios had had time to establish markets along the main routes to Constantinople. As the crusade leaders came one by one to Constantinople he was able to persuade them to take 'the customary Latin oath' to him, as the prospective leader of the expedition against the Turks. Raymond of St-Gilles, count of Toulouse, was the leader who gave him most trouble. He refused to take any oath to the Byzantine emperor. Of all the crusade leaders he was the one closest to Urban II. The pope had consulted him before making his appeal at Clermont. Raymond was the first of the princes to take the cross. He also took a vow never to return from the east. The papal legate Adhemar of LePuy was attached to his contingent. Raymond therefore had some claim to be the military leader of the crusade. The emperor had to be content with an alliance, where each agreed to respect the life and honour of the other.

The first task was the conquest of the Seljuq capital at Nicaea. The Turks preferred to surrender the city to the Byzantines rather than face the fury of the Franks. The fall of Nicaea opened the road leading up to the Anatolian plateau. Alexios had turned down the proposal made by the crusade leaders that he should take personal command of the expedition. But he supplied an important contingent under the command of Taticius, one of his most trusted commanders. Alexios's strategy was straightforward. His aim was to encircle the Turks. The crusaders were to force a passage across Anatolia and to establish control over Cilicia, the Euphrates lands and northern Syria, where there was still a reasonable basis for the restoration of Byzantine rule. To begin with, all went according to plan. The crusaders won a great victory over the Turks on 1 July 1097 at Dorylaion on the edge of the Anatolian plateau. By the end of the summer they were encamped in Cilicia and had started to blockade Antioch. Alexios followed up the victory by conquering large parts of western and northern Asia Minor and pushing the Turks back to the Anatolian plateau.

But the period of cooperation was soon over. Ostensibly the stumbling block was control of Antioch. But it went much deeper than this. The hardships of the passage across Anatolia followed by those of the siege of Antioch transformed the crusade from a joint venture of Byzantium and the west into an ideology that was fixated on Jerusalem. It quickly took on an anti-Byzantine stamp. Such was crusader hostility that the Byzantine commander Taticius abandoned the siege of Antioch. His withdrawal was taken as an act of betrayal. The crusaders' distrust of Byzantine intentions was then reinforced by Alexios's failure to go to their rescue. He had set out and reached Philomelion, a Byzantine outpost

on the Anatolian plateau, but there he was met by two of the leaders of the crusade who had fled from Antioch in despair. They told the emperor that all was lost. Alexios therefore turned back. It was the sensible thing to do. In fact, all was far from lost. Thanks to Bohemond the lower city was secured at the beginning of June 1098 and on 28 June the crusaders inflicted a crushing defeat on the Seljuq relief force. Bohemond secured possession of the city for himself, while the crusade moved on towards Jerusalem.

XII

Antioch was vital to Alexios Komnenos's plans for the recovery of Anatolia from the Turks. It had traditionally been the main Byzantine centre of operations in the east. The crusade leaders had given Alexios an undertaking that they would return Byzantine cities and territories. This Bohemond was refusing to do. Alexios therefore set about trying to evict him from Antioch. His forces had some success. They occupied Cilicia but the key point was the port of Latakia. In 1103 the Byzantines secured the lower city and were endeavouring to dislodge the Normans from the citadel. Such was the pressure that in 1104 Bohemond decided to leave his nephew Tancred in charge of Antioch, while he returned to the west for reinforcements. He won the backing of Pope Paschal II and the support of the French king Philip I, whose daughter he married. It remains an open question whether his expedition qualified as a crusade. The final goal was Palestine. Bohemond was accompanied by a papal legate. The pope presented him with the banner of St Peter and according to a contemporary²⁶ appointed him 'standard-bearer of the army of Christ'. Bohemond's propaganda stressed the treachery of Alexios Komnenos towards the crusade as just cause for his invasion. Bohemond's expedition against Byzantium displayed many features of a crusade, but full recognition would depend on its outcome, simply because crusading theory was still in its infancy. But for Anna Komnena it was a different matter. She was clear that Bohemond's invasion not only had papal approval, but had also been accorded the status of a 'Just War'.²⁷ It confirmed Byzantine apprehensions about the dangers that the crusade held in store.

Bohemond landed on the Albanian coast in 1107 and laid siege to Durazzo. Alexios deployed his forces in the surrounding mountains. Bohemond soon found himself in an impossible position isolated in front of Durazzo; his escape by sea cut off by the Venetians. Paschal II withdrew his support. In 1108 Bohemond sued for peace. He recognized Alexios as his overlord. He accepted that he held the principality of Antioch from Alexios. On paper Alexios had

²⁶ Bartolf of Nangis.

²⁷ Anna Komnena, *Alexiad*, bk xii, ch. viii, para. 5; ed. Lieb and Gautier, III, pp. 80.6–7.

won what he most wanted: recognition of his claims to Antioch. But the treaty remained a dead letter. Bohemond returned to southern Italy. His nephew Tancred continued to rule at Antioch and refused to countenance the concessions made to the Byzantine emperor. Alexios was in no position to enforce them. To meet Bohemond's invasion he had withdrawn his forces from Cilicia and Syria. This allowed the Seljuqs to regain the initiative in western Asia Minor. Alexios was not able to mount an expedition against them until 1116. Its purpose was to evacuate from central Anatolia the Greek populations still living under Turkish rule. It was a tacit admission of defeat.

XIII

Alexios's appeal to Urban II was brilliantly conceived, but Byzantium gained very little from the crusade. In its wake Byzantine forces recovered the rich coastlands of western Anatolia, while they might have reasonably expected to have done anyway. The shadow of 1204 looms over Alexios's achievements and calls in question the success of his restoration of the Byzantine empire. His reputation has also suffered among modern historians because of the *Alexiad*: his daughter Anna Komnena's history of his reign. It is judged to lack objectivity. It is too obviously an exercise in filial piety. It is too much of an idealization. It is all these things, but it also provides a consummate portrait of an age, which, when allowance is made for bias, carries conviction. Anna Komnena's assessment of her father's greatness is borne out by his administrative and fiscal reforms and his church settlement, about which she has relatively little to say. These aspects of her father's reign have to be pieced together from the documentary sources. They provide the best evidence for Alexios's achievement in restoring the empire.

Anna Komnena breathes not a word about her father's appeal to Pope Urban II which triggered off the crusade. This may have been because she did not know about it or because she did not connect her father's appeal with the crusade. But it was more likely done to protect her father's reputation. By the time she was writing – some thirty years after her father's death – it was apparent that the crusade was the cutting edge of western expansion. It was Alexios's task to come to terms with western encroachment, which had begun to make itself felt from the middle of the eleventh century. It took various forms. Least harmful appeared to be the commercial activities of Venetian and other Italian merchants. They offered a solution to Byzantium's need for naval assistance. In order to counter the threat from the Normans at the beginning of his reign Alexios engaged the services of the Venetian fleet. In 1082 in order to pay for them he granted the Venetians special privileges in Constantinople and exemption from the payment of customs duties throughout the empire. It

appeared a very good bargain. In 1111 Alexios entered into a similar arrangement with the Pisans. He reduced their customs duty to 4 per cent. He was angling for their support in the plans which he had – but which never came to anything – to bring the crusader states under Byzantine control. Alexios was using the Italians much as the emperors of the tenth century had used the Russians: to strengthen the empire's naval and commercial resources. The appeal to Urban was intended to complement this by harnessing the military potential of the Franks. Alexios could not have imagined that it would trigger off the crusade, nor that the crusade would cease to be a cooperative venture and be turned against Byzantium. Within Byzantium the crusade not only hardened attitudes towards the west, it also created tensions. Opinion polarized between those who favoured continuing cooperation with the west and those who rejected this approach, preferring to fall back on 'splendid isolation'. This put added pressure on the fault lines that existed within the Comnenian settlement: between the emperor and church; between autocracy and aristocracy; between the Comnenian ascendancy and the excluded; between the capital and the provinces. Alexios hoped that an understanding with the west would provide Byzantium with the additional resources needed to restore its position as a world power. He could not have foreseen how it would undermine Byzantium from within. This was the true nature of Alexios's failure. It was counterbalanced by the success he had in restoring the integrity of the imperial office and the soundness of imperial administration. For more than half a century after his death Byzantium remained a great power.

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE, 1118–1204

Paul Magdalino

BETWEEN the death of Alexios I and the establishment of the Latin empire of Constantinople, eight emperors ruled in the eastern Roman capital. Their reigns were as successful as they were long. Under John II (1118–43) and Manuel I (1143–80) Byzantium remained a wealthy and expansionist power, maintaining the internal structures and external initiatives which were necessary to sustain a traditional imperial identity in a changing Mediterranean world of crusaders, Turks and Italian merchants. But the minority of Manuel's son Alexios II (1180–83) exposed the fragility of the regime inaugurated by Alexios I. Lateral branches of the reigning dynasty seized power in a series of violent usurpations that progressively undermined the security of each usurper, inviting foreign intervention, provincial revolts and attempted *coups d'état*. Under Andronikos I (1183–5), Isaac II (1185–95), Alexios III (1195–1203), Alexios IV (1203–4) and Alexios V (1204), the structural features which had been the strengths of the state in the previous hundred years became liabilities. The empire's international web of clients and marriage alliances, its reputation for fabulous wealth, the overwhelming concentration of people and resources in Constantinople, the privileged status of the 'blood-royal', the cultural self-confidence of the administrative and religious elite: under strong leadership, these factors had come together to make the empire dynamic and great; out of control, they and the reactions they set up combined to make the Fourth Crusade a recipe for disaster.

The Fourth Crusade brought out the worst in the relationship between Byzantium and the west that had been developing in the century since the First Crusade; the violent conquest and sack of Constantinople expressed and deepened old hatreds, and there is clearly some sense in the standard opinion that the event confirmed beyond doubt how incompatible the two cultures had always been. Yet the Fourth Crusade also showed how central Byzantium had become to the world of opportunity that Latin Europe was discovering in the east, and how great an effort its rulers had made to use this position to advantage. Growing estrangement came from growing involvement; the



Map 16 The Byzantine empire in the twelfth century

xenophobia which manifested itself in the 1182 massacre of the Latins in Constantinople was the reverse side of the accommodation of westerners and their values taking place at all social and cultural levels. Both sides of the coin are reflected in the main source for the period, the *History* of Niketas Choniates, which combines impassioned outbursts against the Latins with idealization of individual western leaders and disapproval of his own society in terms which echo criticism of Byzantium.

SOURCES

Choniates's *History* covers the years 1118–1206. The author was a contemporary of most of the events he relates, and from about 1175 he was an increasingly close eyewitness of developments at the centre of power, first as a student and clerk in government service, then as a rising government official involved in the making and presentation of imperial policy. Such credentials, together with the power, the nuance, the acuity and the high moral tone of his narrative, make it difficult to resist seeing the period through his eyes. However, there is a growing recognition that the very qualities which make Choniates a great literary commentator on his age also make him a sophisticated manipulator of the facts to fit his picture of a decadent society being punished by Divine Providence for the excesses of its rulers and the corruption of their subjects. For the period 1118–76 his account can be balanced by the *History* of John Kinnamos, which is slightly more critical of John II and much more favourable to Manuel I, whom the author served for most of his reign. Otherwise, as for earlier and later periods of Byzantine history, the picture has to be supplemented and corrected by a wide range of other material – literary, legislative, archival, epigraphic, visual. The balance of this material partly reflects and partly determines what makes the twelfth century look distinctive. It is richer than the preceding century in high-quality information from Latin chronicles, in rhetorical celebration of emperors and in canon law collections which preserve a wealth of imperial and patriarchal rulings. The flow of documentation from Patmos and Mount Athos dries up for much of the period, though some material has been preserved from other monastic archives in Asia Minor and Macedonia, and the archives of Venice, Pisa and Genoa begin to yield substantial evidence for the movement of their merchants into Constantinople and other markets throughout the empire.

JOHN II

Alexios I left his successor with a state in good working order. Territorially it was smaller, especially in the east, than the empire of the early eleventh century,

but thanks to Alexios's reforms and good management over a long reign, it was once more an effective financial and military power, and as a result of Alexios's controversial family policy, it had a structural coherence which was largely new to Byzantium. After the failure of numerous conspiracies against Alexios, the ruling family of Komnenos had established itself not only as the unchallenged source of the imperial succession, but also, in association with the Doukai, as the centre of a new princely aristocracy in which wealth, status and military command depended on kinship to the emperor and were reflected in a hierarchy of titles all of which had originally applied to the emperor. The emperor's kinsmen were in such a dominant position, and so widely connected, that for almost the first time in the empire's history the threat to the ruling dynasty from a rival faction was entirely eliminated. Instead, competition for power had moved inside the family circle. The weakness of the system was that it gave the whole imperial family a share and a stake in the imperial inheritance without providing any firm rules of precedence. Thus John II, though Alexios's eldest son and crowned co-emperor in 1092, had to contend with a serious effort by his mother Eirene to exclude him from the succession in favour of his sister Anna and her husband Nikephoros Bryennios. Only by building up his own group of loyal supporters, inside and outside the family, and making a pre-emptive strike while Alexios lay on his deathbed did John secure his claim, and only by putting those supporters into key positions did he prevent a conspiracy by Anna within a year of his accession. To gain and maintain power, the emperor had had to create his own faction. He was well served by the members of this faction, especially by John Axouch, a Turkish captive with whom he had grown up and whom he entrusted with the supreme command of the armed forces. But the promotion of these favourites played a part in causing the growth of an opposition at court. Anna and Nikephoros were no longer a threat; Nikephoros served the emperor loyally until his death in 1138, leaving Anna to nurse her grievances in writing the epic biography of her father, the *Alexiad*. However, their place as a magnet for the disaffected was taken by John's brother, the *sebastokrator* Isaac, who had supported John at their father's death, but in 1130 sought the throne for himself. When his plot was detected, he fled with his son John into exile among the empire's eastern neighbours, moving from court to court until he sought reconciliation in 1138. But his son again defected to the Turks in 1141, Isaac remained a prime political suspect and his other son, Andronikos, would later inherit his role.

John's power base in Constantinople was secure enough to allow him to leave the city on campaign year after year, but this ceaseless campaigning, in which he surpassed most of his imperial predecessors, including his father, is indicative of his need to command the loyalty of the army and to prove himself worthy of his inheritance. It was rarely necessitated by emergencies as serious as

those Alexios had faced for most of his reign, and it was not clearly dictated by any pre-existing strategy of territorial expansion. Certainly, the recuperation of lost territory was high on the agenda which John took over from his father. The First Crusade had originated in a Byzantine attempt to reverse the Turkish occupation of Asia Minor and northern Syria, and for the last twenty years of his reign Alexios I had expended great military and diplomatic energies in pressing his claims to Antioch and other territories which the crusaders had appropriated. Yet over the same twenty years, the empire had learned to live with the eastern borders which Alexios had established in the wake of the crusade, and with the new Turkish dynastic states, of the Danishmendid amirs and the Seljuqid sultans, which had formed in the lost territories of central and eastern Anatolia. The empire was left in control of the coastal plains and river valleys which were the most valuable parts of Asia Minor to a ruling elite based, more than ever, on Constantinople; the loss of the Anatolian plateau and the frontier regions of northern Mesopotamia, which had been the homeland of many military families, greatly facilitated the integration of the aristocracy into the Comnenian dynastic regime. Alexios's successor thus had to strike a balance between the completion of unfinished business and the consolidation of such gains as had been made. Either way, he was expected to produce victories, and these John delivered consistently. Their propaganda value was their most lasting result, and possibly their most important objective.

The year after his accession, John took and fortified the town of Laodicea in the Meander valley; the next year he captured and garrisoned Sozopolis, on the plateau to the east. This might have been the beginning of a campaign of reconquest against the Seljuqid sultanate of Rum; on the other hand, both places lay on the land route to Attaleia, and John's later interest in this area suggests that he might have been securing his lines of communication for an expedition to Antioch. Yet if Antioch was the goal, it is surprising that John did not simultaneously revive the negotiations for a dynastic union which Alexios had been conducting at the end of his reign, especially since the disaster of the battle of the Field of Blood (1119) provided an ideal opportunity for John to offer imperial protection in return for concessions. There is no evidence that John tried to take advantage of the crisis in the Latin east, as Venice did by joining the crusading movement. Indeed, the fact that John initially refused to renew his father's treaty with Venice, and did not change his mind even in 1122, when a Venetian armada passed through Byzantine waters on its way to Palestine, suggests that the new emperor was pursuing a policy of deliberate isolationism with regard to the Latin world. Only when the Venetian fleet ravaged Chios, Samos and Modon on its return journey in 1125 did John agree to renew the treaty. This he did in 1126, acceding to two further Venetian demands.

Meanwhile, he had been forced to turn his attention from Asia to Europe by an invasion of the Petcheneks which caused great alarm but which he defeated by resolute military action in 1122. No campaigns are recorded for the next five years, during which John became occupied by diplomatic relations not only with Venice but also with Hungary, where he was connected through his wife to the ruling Árpád dynasty. In 1125 he welcomed her kinsman Almos as a refugee from the king of Hungary, Stephen II. Stephen took offence at this support for a political rival, and he may have felt threatened by the Byzantine rapprochement with Venice, which disputed Hungary's dominion over the cities of the Dalmatian coast. There followed a two-year war, in which Stephen attacked the imperial border fortresses and stirred the Serbs into revolt, while John retaliated by leading two expeditions to the Danube to restore the *status quo*.

When in 1130 he returned to campaigning in Asia Minor, it was with a new objective: the northern sector of the frontier, where the imperial position in Bithynia and along the Black Sea was being eroded by the aggressive Turkish amirate of the Danishmendids, and by the defections of the Greek magnates who controlled much of the littoral. For six years the emperor led expeditions into Paphlagonia. The Byzantine sources highlight the successful sieges of Kastamon (twice) and Gangra, thus giving the impression that this was a war of reconquest. But these and other gains in the area were soon retaken after the emperor's departure and it is difficult to believe that John realistically expected to be able to hold them with the modest garrisons that he could afford to leave behind. On balance, it seems clear that the aim was also to make a show of force, to raid the flocks of the Turkish nomads in retaliation for past depredations and to impress all in Constantinople and in the imperial entourage whose loyalty was wavering. For John's first campaign against the Danishmendids was cut short by the conspiracy of his brother Isaac, and it was to the Danishmendids that Isaac fled to avoid arrest in 1130. A year or two later, John abandoned another campaign in order to deal with a plot to put Isaac on the throne. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that the emperor's subsequent successes were advertised to maximum effect and that he celebrated the taking of Kastamon by a triumphal entry into Constantinople, to the accompaniment of panegyrical songs and speeches (1133). These celebrations set the tone for the extravagant glorification of imperial achievements that was to characterize the imperial image for the rest of the century.

Isaac's movements in exile, which took him from Melitene to Armenia, Cilicia, Iconium and Jerusalem, help to explain why, from 1135, John made larger plans for political and military intervention further east. The opportunity arose when Alice, the widow of Bohemond II of Antioch, offered their daughter Constance in marriage to John's youngest son Manuel. The offer was a

desperate and doomed attempt to prevent Constance from marrying Raymond of Poitiers, to whom she had been promised, but it encouraged John to focus on Antioch as the key to the strategy for dealing with all the empire's eastern neighbours, Muslim and Christian. Raymond's marriage to Constance in 1136 provided a justification for military action in support of imperial claims to Cilicia and Antioch. An imperial expedition in 1137 succeeded in reconquering Cilicia from the Armenian Rupenid prince Leo, who held the mountainous areas, and the Latins who held the cities of the plain, Adana, Mopsuestia and Tarsus. John also compelled the new prince of Antioch to become his vassal, to allow him right of entry into the city, and to hand it over in return for investiture with the cities of the Syrian interior – Aleppo, Shaizar, Homs and Hama – once these were recaptured from the Muslims. The subsequent campaign to take them failed, and so did the emperor's attempt to use the excuse to take possession of Antioch. But overall, the performance of the imperial army and the deference showed by all the local rulers were a triumphant demonstration of the empire's and the emperor's power. According to Choniates, it had the effect of making John's exiled brother Isaac seek a reconciliation, 'for lacking money, and seeing the emperor John universally renowned for his feats in battle, he found no one who would fall in with his ambitions'.¹ During the following years, John returned to Asia Minor, to strengthen the frontier defences in Bithynia, to strike at Neokaisareia, the town from which the Danishmendids threatened the eastern section of the Black Sea coastal strip, and to secure and extend imperial control in the southern sector of the frontier in western Asia Minor. Yet these last operations, in the area where he had conducted his earliest campaigns, were clearly a prelude to the new expedition to Syria which he launched at the end of 1142. He wintered in the mountains of Cilicia, preparing to strike at Antioch in the spring and from there to go on to Jerusalem.

The emperor's death from a hunting accident in February 1143 aborted what looks like the most ambitious attempt at restoring the pre-Islamic empire that any Byzantine ruler had undertaken since the tenth century. John was finally making up for Alexios's failure to take personal command of the First Crusade. With the wisdom of hindsight, we may question whether the course of history would have been very different if John had lived. His constant campaigning and drilling had made the Byzantine field army into a superb expeditionary force with an unrivalled siege capability, but he had pushed its performance to the limit. It had consistently run into problems when operating beyond the empire's borders and rarely held on to its acquisitions. In addition to the standard logistical constraints of medieval warfare, there was the basic problem that the empire was frequently unwelcome in many of its former territories,

¹ Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 32

even among the Greeks of Turkish-occupied Asia Minor. John had, moreover, developed the army at the expense of the navy. However, Cilicia had remained in imperial control since 1138. If John had succeeded in his aim of welding Antioch and Cilicia together with Cyprus and Attaleia into a kingdom for his son Manuel, the benefits to the empire and to the crusader states would have been enormous; at the very least, if the imperial army had remained in Syria throughout 1143, the emperor would have formed a coalition of local Christians that would have checked the Islamic counter-crusade of Zengi and thus postponed, or even prevented, the fall of Edessa and the calling of the Second Crusade.

The revival of imperial interest in the crusader states had permanent consequences in that it led to a renewal of Byzantine links with western Europe. During the first half of his reign, John had retreated from the active western diplomacy that Alexios had conducted. But this changed in 1135, when John revived imperial claims to Antioch and sought to cover his back against interference from Roger II of Sicily, who also had an interest in the principality. He renewed the empire's treaty with Pisa, negotiated alliances with the German emperors Lothar and Conrad, and sent a very conciliatory letter to Pope Innocent II on the subject of church union. Most importantly for the future, the alliance with Conrad III was sealed by the betrothal of Conrad's sister-in-law Bertha to John's youngest son Manuel. Manuel not only happened to be available; he had also been proposed as a husband for the heiress to Antioch, and was the intended ruler of the projected kingdom of Antioch, Cilicia, Cyprus and Attaleia.

Apart from the conspiracies of his sister and brother, the internal history of John's reign looks conspicuously uneventful. On the whole, it seems fair to conclude that the paucity of documentation generally reflects a lack of intervention or of the need for it. As with the frontiers, it was a case of maintaining internal structures that had stabilized in the last ten years of the previous reign. John's most significant policy change was to reduce expenditure on the fleet, on the advice of his finance minister John of Poutza. Although he looked outside his family for individual support, John upheld the ascendancy of the Komnenos and Doukas kin-groups, and continued to consolidate their connections by marriage with other aristocratic families. In the church, he was by Byzantine standards remarkably non-interventionist, apparently because church affairs had settled down after the disputes of Alexios's reign. He left his mark on them principally through his generous benefactions to churches and monasteries, above all through his foundation of the monastery of Christ Pantokrator. The foundation charter and the church buildings provide the best surviving picture of the appearance, the organization and the wealth of a great metropolitan monastery and its annexes, which included a hospital.

MANUEL I

For most of his reign, John had managed to prevent his own children from being divided by the sibling rivalries which had bedevilled his own succession. Yet in the months before his death, his arrangements were thrown into confusion when Alexios, his eldest son and co-emperor of long-standing, fell ill and died, followed shortly by the next son, Andronikos. This left John, on his deathbed, with a highly invidious choice between his older surviving son, Isaac, who was in Constantinople, and the youngest, Manuel, who was with him in Cilicia. John no doubt voiced many of the arguments for Manuel's superiority which the Byzantine sources put into his mouth, but it is hard to fault the explanation of William of Tyre that Manuel was chosen in order to ensure the army's safe return. Prompt action forestalled any attempt by Isaac to take advantage of his presence in the capital. Manuel was thus able to enter Constantinople and have himself crowned without opposition. As the winner, he was able to command or commission the propaganda which represented his election as providential and inevitable. Yet Isaac nursed a legitimate grievance, and his sympathizers included his father's right-hand man, John Axouch. Isaac was not the only one who coveted his brother's throne: their brother-in-law, the caesar John Roger, attempted a *coup*, backed by a faction of Norman exiles, and their uncle Isaac was believed to be still awaiting his opportunity. Even apparently innocuous female relatives, Manuel's aged aunt Anna and his widowed sister-in-law Eirene, were treated as political suspects. The new emperor was unmarried and therefore without immediate prospect of legitimate issue. All in all, the circumstances of his accession put him under intense pressure to prove himself by emulating his father's achievements without putting his inheritance at risk.

The immediate priority was to bring the unfinished foreign business of John's last years to an honourable conclusion. There could be no question of the emperor leading another grand expedition to Syria, so Manuel contented himself with sending an army and a fleet to ravage the territory of Antioch. This and the fall of Edessa to Zengi in 1144 obliged Raymond of Antioch to come to Constantinople and swear obedience, while Manuel promised to come to the prince's aid. There was also the matter of the German alliance. Manuel's marriage to Bertha of Sulzbach had been negotiated and she had come to Constantinople, before he had any prospect of becoming emperor. It was probably to extract more favourable terms from Conrad III that Manuel put off the marriage and exchanged embassies with Roger II of Sicily, against whom the alliance with Conrad had been directed. When he finally married Bertha, who adopted the Greek name Eirene, in 1146 he had evidently won some sort of unwritten promise from Conrad, possibly to guarantee Manuel a

free hand in the east, but more likely to give him a share of the conquests from his planned invasion of southern Italy.

These treaties opened up commitments and prospects which Manuel did not, however, immediately pursue. Instead, he used the security they gave him to revert to the limited-objective campaigning against the Turks which had characterized his father's reign, with even more emphasis on military victory for its own sake. The expedition which he led as far as Iconium in 1146 was ostensibly in retaliation for the capture of a border fortress in Cilicia. In effect, however, it was a display of the emperor's prowess in leading his army up to the walls of the sultan's capital and then fighting heroic rearguard actions in the retreat. This gratuitous heroism was intended to vindicate Manuel's youthful heroism in the eyes of his critics. It may also have been meant to impress the Latins with the emperor's zeal for holy war. But it did nothing to help the crusader states, and that help now came in a form which exposed Manuel's lack of a strategy for dealing with the fall of Edessa and the repercussions that this was bound to have in the wider world of Latin Christendom. The fact that the Byzantine sources fail to mention the event which provoked the Second Crusade suggests that they seriously underestimated its importance.

The Second Crusade would have been a major military and political crisis even if it had been confined to the expedition of Louis VII, as Manuel was originally led to expect. The size of Louis's army, his royal status, which precluded any oath of vassalage to the emperor, and the ties which bound him and his entourage to the nobility of the Latin east were sufficient to thwart any effective concordance between Byzantine claims and crusader objectives. The problem was more than doubled by the unexpected participation of Conrad III with an equally huge army and an even touchier sense of sovereign dignity. His arrival in the east strained their alliance almost to breaking point, since it brought the German emperor-elect where Manuel least wanted him from where he needed him most, namely as a threat to Roger II of Sicily. Roger now took advantage of the situation to seize the island of Corfu and to launch raids on the Greek mainland, whose garrisons had been redeployed to shadow the crusading armies. It was alarmingly reminiscent of earlier Norman invasions of Epiros, and Manuel, like Alexios I in 1082, responded by calling on Venetian naval help, in return for which he renewed Venice's trade privileges and extended the Venetian quarter in Constantinople.

In these circumstances, it is understandable that Manuel moved the crusading armies as quickly as possible across the Bosphoros into Asia Minor, where the treaty of peace that he had signed with the sultan of Iconium may well have contributed to the appalling casualties they suffered at the hands of the Turks. These casualties, which rendered the armies largely ineffective by the time they reached Syria and Palestine, earned Manuel a lasting reputation as the saboteur

of the Second Crusade. However, they did lead eventually to a renewal of the alliance with Conrad III, who, when he fell ill at Ephesus in December 1147, accepted Manuel's invitation to come and recuperate in Constantinople. Manuel then provided ships and money for Conrad to continue to Palestine and recruit a new army. On his return to Europe late in 1148, the two monarchs met at Thessalonica to agree on a joint invasion and partition of southern Italy and Sicily. The Byzantine share was to count as the dowry owing to Manuel from his marriage to Bertha-Eirene. The alliance was sealed by the marriage of Manuel's niece Theodora to Conrad's cousin Henry of Babenberg.

The renewal of the German alliance determined the principal orientation of Manuel's foreign policy for the rest of his reign. For the next twelve years he remained committed to a partnership with the Hohenstaufen which he hoped would bring substantial territorial gains in Italy. He pursued this goal despite setbacks and distractions, and despite the gradual divergence of interests between the two empires after Conrad III died and was succeeded by Frederick Barbarossa (1152). As soon as he had recovered Corfu from its Sicilian garrison in 1149, he planned to carry the war into Italy. The invasion plan was frustrated, first by bad weather, and then by wars in the Balkans which were stirred up by the disruptive diplomacy of Roger II. Thus the campaigns which Manuel led from 1150 to 1155 against the Serbian *župans* of Raška and King Géza II of Hungary were essentially diversions, for all the energy he put into them and the considerable publicity they generated. However, the war at sea continued, and at the death of Roger II (1154) Manuel moved to take advantage of the insecurity and unpopularity of the young William I, reviving the invasion plan of 1149. Without German participation, the campaign eventually came to grief at Brindisi in 1156, and Frederick disowned it as a Greek initiative which interfered with his own programme of Roman imperial renewal. Yet for a time, the Byzantine agents had enjoyed great success, receiving the co-operation of disaffected Norman lords and the submission of many towns throughout Apulia. Manuel did not act as if either the German alliance or the prospect of a Byzantine revival in Italy had been destroyed by the defeat. His agents returned to sow disaffection against William I in 1157, and he continued to seek collaboration with Frederick Barbarossa even after he had concluded a peace treaty with William in 1158. In 1160, they were still exchanging embassies to discuss joint action against Sicily, and a Byzantine request for a share of imperial dominion in the Italian peninsula.

Manuel's basic and consistent objective was the acquisition of the coastal towns of Apulia: they had a Greek population, they had belonged to the imperial province of Longobardia before 1071, and control of them would prevent the recurrence of invasions like those of Robert Guiscard, Bohemond and Roger II. Beyond that, Byzantine territorial aims in Italy were flexible,

and by 1160 it seems that Manuel had traded his empire's historic claims to Calabria and the Naples area in return for the recognition of a right to the Pentapolis, the area comprising the city of Ancona and its hinterland. Ancona was the Byzantine base of operations in 1155–6, and it had been chosen for this purpose in 1149. It may well, therefore, have been designated in the treaty of 1148 between Conrad and Manuel as belonging to the Byzantine sphere of influence. Justification for the Byzantine claim could have been found in the fact that the Pentapolis had been part of the old exarchate of Ravenna. While the coastal towns of Apulia were ruled by the king of Sicily, Ancona was the only alternative to Venice as a gateway for Byzantine agents, envoys, troops and subsidies to reach the empire's Italian and German allies – and Venice was basically opposed to any Byzantine revival in Italy. Once the coastal towns of Apulia also reverted to Byzantine rule, possession of the Pentapolis would have given Manuel control of almost the entire east coast of Italy.

The failure of his negotiations with Frederick Barbarossa in 1160 caused Manuel to try an alternative to the German alliance, which was coming under strain for other reasons. Frederick's increasingly strident imperialism made him less receptive to the idea of sharing sovereignty in Italy with the Greek empire. Indeed, his programme of reclaiming imperial rights, which he had stated at the diet of Roncaglia (1158) and showed every sign of enforcing, threatened to change the balance of power in Italy and make the Hohenstaufen empire the main danger to Byzantium's western flank. At the same time, his quarrel with Pope Adrian IV, and his refusal to recognize the canonical election of Adrian's successor, Alexander III, made him an embarrassment for Manuel's relations with other parts of Latin Christendom, particularly the crusader states. Above all, the bond of kinship between the two emperors was severed when Manuel's German wife Bertha-Eirene died in 1159.

From 1161, Manuel aligned himself with Pope Alexander III and all who took his side against Frederick and the antipope elected by Frederick's council of Pavia (1160). Thus relations between Byzantium and Alexander's main European supporter, Louis VII of France, began to improve for the first time since the Second Crusade. Manuel's main diplomatic priority, however, was to cultivate close relations with all those in the Italian peninsula who, like Alexander, felt threatened by Frederick's expansionism. Chief among them was the king of Sicily, and Manuel twice entered into negotiations with a view to marrying his daughter to William II, who succeeded his father, William I, in 1166. But Manuel also poured money into creating an extensive web of potential supporters among the towns and the aristocracy throughout Italy. Byzantine money helped to rebuild the walls of Milan, razed at Frederick's orders in 1162. To the pope himself, Manuel not only gave material support but offered the prospect of reuniting the Greek and Roman churches, and several

discussions were held. In return, the pope gave Manuel to understand that he would consider recognizing him as sole Roman emperor.

This ambition seems like a vastly unrealistic escalation of Manuel's previous aims, but it is unlikely to have involved any major political changes, other than excluding Frederick Barbarossa from Italy and giving Manuel the senior place among the rulers of Christendom. For the pope to entertain the notion, it must have been predicated on a guarantee to maintain the *status quo* in Italy: the continued existence of the communes in the north, the papal lordship in the centre and the kingdom of Sicily in the south. It is far from certain that the arrangement would have involved any territorial concessions such as Manuel had sought from the Hohenstaufen. The ulterior aim of Manuel's diplomacy after 1160 may have been to pressurize Frederick Barbarossa into renewing the alliance. The prospect of renewing it in 1170–2 was certainly enough to make Manuel pull out of a marriage treaty with William II of Sicily for what he thought was a better offer from Frederick. The offer did not materialize, and the 'cold war' resumed, but the episode demonstrated that what Manuel sought above all was a partnership with the sovereign powers of the Christian west that would guarantee security for his empire within negotiated territorial limits. In the papal alliance as in the Hohenstaufen alliance, Italy was the focus for negotiation, and Ancona remained the Byzantine gateway to Italy.

The peace of Venice in 1177, in which Frederick Barbarossa and Alexander III settled their differences and Italian affairs without reference to Manuel, put an end to the latter's hopes of either territorial gains in Italy or a western imperial crown. However, it was not the end of his diplomacy, or of his deeper ambition to align his dynastic programme of imperial restoration with the power structure of Latin Christendom from which his empire had been perilously excluded at the time of the Second Crusade. That ambition was as close to being realized at his death in 1180 as it would ever be. He had failed to secure a working relationship with Frederick Barbarossa, but he remained on good terms with Alexander III, his daughter had married Renier of Montferrat, from the major magnate family of north-western Italy, and his son was betrothed to the daughter of the king of France.

On other fronts, while Manuel did not neglect the security and the extension of the empire's borders, his initiatives were ultimately shaped by the aim of being taken into partnership by the great powers of the west. The crusader states provided an ideal opportunity for him to enhance his credentials in western eyes. The disaster of the Second Crusade had left them increasingly vulnerable to Zengi's successor, Nur al-Din, who had taken over Damascus following the failed crusader offensive, and had made the kings of the west wary of getting involved in a major new expedition to the Holy Land. Although they were

responsive to the plight of the Latin settlers, their own domestic problems and mutual rivalries kept them in Europe, while the armed pilgrimages undertaken by some of their vassals did not properly compensate for the lack of a general crusade. In the circumstances, the princes of Outremer turned increasingly to Byzantium for military and financial aid and the Byzantine emperor was only too pleased to avoid the recurrence of a general crusade.

Soon after the Second Crusade, the northern principalities suffered a crisis when Raymond of Edessa was killed in battle (1149) and Joscelin II of Edessa was captured (1150). Manuel bought the remaining castles of the county of Edessa from Joscelin's wife and attempted to persuade Raymond's widow Constance to marry his recently widowed brother-in-law, the half-Norman caesar John Roger. However, the castles soon fell to the Muslims, and Constance rejected John Roger in favour of Reynald of Châtillon, a recent arrival from France. Neither these failures nor Reynald's subsequent raid on Byzantine Cyprus, in conjunction with Thoros, the Armenian prince of Cilicia, drew an immediate response from Manuel, who was occupied with the war with Sicily. Only when this was over did the emperor intervene personally with a show of force. Moreover, his expedition to Cilicia and Syria in 1158–9 was not, despite superficial resemblances, a repeat of those conducted by his father. It followed the conclusion of a marriage alliance with King Baldwin III of Jerusalem, who in 1157 broke with crusader precedent and sought a bride from the Byzantine imperial family. Thus the reassertion of imperial supremacy in Cilicia and Antioch, and the humiliation of Reynald and Thoros, were performed with the full cooperation of the senior potentate in Outremer, who accepted them as the ritual price the Latin settlers had to pay for Byzantine material aid, and as the necessary prelude to joint military action against Nur al-Din by all the local Christian powers. Although this action was cut short when Manuel was recalled to Constantinople by news of a conspiracy, he continued to work closely with the crusader states. It was to Tripoli, and then to Antioch, that he looked for a new bride after the death of Bertha-Eirene in 1100. He married Maria of Antioch, daughter of Raymond and Constance, in 1161, and some fifteen years later strengthened his connection with her brother, Prince Bohemond III, by providing the latter with a Comnenian bride. The connection with Jerusalem was briefly interrupted at Baldwin III's death in 1163, but it resumed when the king's brother and successor, Amalric, decided he could not do without Byzantine aid and negotiated a marriage to another imperial relative (1167). Following a treaty in 1168, a Byzantine naval force joined Amalric in an invasion of Egypt (1169), and the king came to Constantinople to negotiate a fresh agreement in 1171. The resulting plans for further joint operations against Egypt were halted at Amalric's death (1174), but were back on the agenda in 1176–7, when a Byzantine fleet was despatched to Palestine.

These ventures came to nothing militarily, but they proved that the empire would deploy impressive resources in offensive as well as defensive support of its Latin allies, and thus undoubtedly helped to impede the counter-crusade of Nur al-Din and Saladin. Manuel further bolstered the Latin settlements both by providing their princes with generous subsidies, and by ransoming their knights who were captured in battle. In return, the emperor asked only for due recognition of his overlordship, and for fulfilment of the long-standing treaty agreement to appoint a Greek patriarch in Antioch.

Despite his considerable investment in Latin Syria, Manuel did not revisit the area after 1159. On the other hand, he returned more than once to the Danube frontier after King Géza II of Hungary died in 1161, leaving a disputed succession. The position of Hungary between the German and Byzantine empires, and adjacent to the empire's Serbian vassals, gave it a strategic importance in Manuel's growing conflict of interest with Frederick Barbarossa, which increased his concern to ensure that it was in friendly hands. His kinship with the Hungarian royal dynasty via his mother, and the empire's historic claim to certain frontier areas of the kingdom, also incited his intervention in Hungarian affairs. Although Manuel initially failed to instal his first candidate, Stephen IV, repeated campaigning from 1162 to 1167 ensured the future succession of his next protégé, Béla III, and the cession to the empire of Béla's patrimony, consisting of the central Dalmatian coast and an area south of the middle Danube known as Frangochorion, which included the old Roman frontier capital of Sirmium. Béla III lived in Constantinople from 1164, where he was betrothed to Manuel's daughter Maria and regarded as heir apparent to the throne until the birth of the emperor's son Alexios (1169). He took power in Hungary at the death of his brother Stephen III (1172) and served the empire loyally while Manuel was alive.

On the empire's other land frontier, in Asia Minor, Manuel's preferred policy was similarly one of trying to maintain and improve the *status quo* by drawing the main regional power, the sultanate of Iconium, into the imperial orbit. After some fighting in 1159–60, Manuel welcomed the sultan, Kilic Arslan II, to Constantinople in 1161. The two rulers concluded a treaty whereby the emperor ritually adopted the sultan as his son and undertook to subsidize his wars against his Turkish rivals; in return, any important cities recovered from the latter were to be surrendered to the emperor, and the sultan promised to prevent raids on the empire's territories. Kilic Arslan did not keep his side of the treaty, which effectively allowed him to unify Turkish Asia Minor under his rule. But it brought peace to western Anatolia for fourteen years, and it set up an effective Islamic rival to the rising power of Nur al-Din, which helped the crusader states. Only when the death of Nur al-Din (1174) changed the configuration of power in the Islamic world did Manuel adopt a policy of

confrontation with Kilic Arslan, building fortresses on the Anatolian plateau to control the routes to the east (1175), and then mounting a major expedition to conquer the sultan's capital of Iconium (1176). It is also clear from the publicity surrounding this offensive that it was not only a belated move from appeasement to reprisal, but also a holy war intended to restore Asia Minor to imperial rule and open up the land route for pilgrims to Palestine. The grand expedition of 1176 was thus, above all, the culmination of Manuel's long attempt to redeem the failure of the Second Crusade which had come to grief in the borderlands of Asia Minor. It was meant to finish, under imperial leadership, the business that had got out of imperial control in the First Crusade. The resounding defeat which the expedition suffered at Myriokephalon was correspondingly a devastating setback to Manuel's attempt to take over the crusading movement and to reverse a century of Turkish occupation in Asia Minor. Yet the empire's army, finances and borders were intact; its power in the Balkans and its influence in eastern Europe had never stood higher. Louis VII of France gave a big vote of confidence by sending his daughter Agnes as a future bride for the young Alexios II. There is no knowing how things would have developed if Manuel had not died only four years after the battle.

Manuel conducted his warfare and his diplomacy with lavish ceremony and rhetorical publicity which explicitly recalled Constantine and Justinian. This and the autocratic style which he adopted in his legislation and in his regulation of church doctrine led Choniates to assert, and modern scholars to accept, that Manuel dreamed the impossible dream of restoring the Roman empire in all its ancient glory. Careful attention to the reality behind the rhetorical and ceremonial image reveals that Manuel's Roman imperialism was more concerned with security than with expansion. It is true that at different times he sought the elimination of the two main neighbouring states, the Norman kingdom of Sicily and the Seljuqid sultanate of Rum, which had recently been founded at the empire's expense. However, he did not do so consistently, and he did so only within the framework of an alliance. His imperialism only began to depart from tradition after 1160, when he was obliged to seek an alternative to the German alliance. The main departure (though even this had precedents) was that instead of following the time-honoured practice of weakening the empire's neighbours by setting them against each other or destabilizing their regimes, he sought to establish a ring of reliable satellite kingdoms which he strengthened against their enemies in return for their support. The kingdom of Jerusalem, Hungary, the sultanate and the kingdom of Sicily were all tried in this role to a greater or lesser extent.

In general, it seems clear that Manuel sought allies and clients more than he sought territories. As we have seen, he hoped that the German alliance would give him control over the Adriatic coast of Italy, while from Hungary he gained

Frangochorion and the Dalmatian coast. Otherwise, apart from his rather belated crusade of reconquest in Asia Minor, his main identifiable objective was the coastal area of Egypt, which was to be the Byzantine share in the partition of the country agreed between Manuel and Amalric in 1168 and, presumably, in later renewals of their treaty. This was hardly a programme to restore the empire of Justinian. At the same time, it was more than random opportunism. The Egyptian coast, including the ports of Alexandria and Damietta, was the most sought-after trading destination in the Mediterranean. Possession of the east coast of Italy together with possession of the Dalmatian coast would have given the empire control of the Adriatic and thus of the access to eastern markets from Venice, the main trading city in the Mediterranean. Realization of all these territorial goals would have allowed the empire to dominate the commerce of the eastern Mediterranean and thus to renegotiate its treaties with the Italian maritime republics. That this was indeed Manuel's aim is suggested, first, by his considerable investment in the Byzantine navy, and, secondly, by the evolution of his policy towards Venice, an evolution which parallels his adoption of a less indulgent line in dealing with the Byzantine church, the other main beneficiary of economic privilege. In 1148, during the crisis of the Second Crusade, he had extended the already exceptional privileges enjoyed by Venetian merchants throughout the empire, but in 1171 he ordered their arrest and the confiscation of their goods. The Pisans and Genoese to some extent took their place, but not with the same exemption from the 10 per cent sales tax. Pisa was unable to negotiate an improvement to the terms of its original treaty with Alexios I, which had allowed a total exemption only on bullion exports, and a 6 per cent reduction on imports of other goods. The Genoese were originally admitted on the same basis in 1155, but had to accept further restrictions on the 6 per cent concession in 1169.

In the light of recent work on Byzantium in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it is clear that Manuel's power was more impressive and his ambitions more moderate than used to be thought. However, his achievements still fell short of his ambitions, and his military failures against Sicily and the Turks were spectacular, perhaps more so than his successes against Hungary. The empire declined so rapidly after his death that historians from Choniates onwards have sought, and continue to seek, the seeds of its decline in his reign and in his policies. Modern commentators have also looked for structural weaknesses in the imperial regime of the Comnenian dynasty.

THE LEGACY AND THE SUCCESSORS OF MANUEL I, 1180–1204

Choniates believed that the empire and its rulers had incurred God's displeasure by their impious behaviour, and he identified the beginnings of this sinfulness

in Manuel – in the emperor's belief in astrology, in his jealousy of popular and talented nobles, in his extravagant expenditure, in his favouritism of kinsmen and foreigners and in his assumption of authority in church matters. These were flaws that Manuel could be seen, with hindsight, to have shared with the emperors who reigned after him with obviously disastrous effect. But in picking on these characteristics, Choniates also undoubtedly echoed criticisms which had surfaced during Manuel's lifetime. His military failures in Italy and Asia Minor, together with his failure to produce a male heir by his first wife or in the first eight years of his second marriage, must have led to speculation that he had offended God by his style of government, and the speculation would have been encouraged by those male relatives, notably Manuel's cousin Andronikos, who were suspected of harbouring designs on the throne. Thus the insecurity which Manuel had faced at his accession stayed with him throughout his reign, and the soundness of his imperial edifice was already under scrutiny during his lifetime. The imperial image projected by the voluminous court rhetoric of his reign seems altogether too confident to be plausible.

Yet on the whole the image commanded respect from foreigners and subjects alike. Manuel controlled his subjects, his resources and his policies as well as any of his imperial predecessors or royal contemporaries. What he did not control was beyond the control of any ruler: the tender age at which his son succeeded him. The crisis of Byzantium after 1180 was in a very obvious way the familiar story of a monarchy thrown into disarray by a minority.

However, Byzantium had experienced minorities in the past without falling apart and falling prey to foreign conquest. Is there a case for thinking that the disasters of the period 1180–1204 were waiting to happen, inherent in the structure of the empire of the Komnenoi?

Thirty years ago, the view prevailed that although the Comnenian emperors gave the empire a temporary reprieve by their vigorous military leadership, their aristocratic dynastic priorities undermined the efficacy of the state system that had made Byzantium great in the 'imperial centuries'. According to the classic formulation of George Ostrogorsky,

in structure the Empire now differed considerably from the rigid centralized state of the middle Byzantine period. The age of the Comneni saw an intensification of the feudalizing process and those very feudal elements in the provinces, against which the tenth-century emperors had battled with such insistence, were to become the mainstay of the new state... Byzantium had thrown over its once solid foundations and its defences, and its economic and financial strength were greatly diminished. This is the explanation why the successes of the Comneni were not enduring and were followed by the collapse of the Byzantine state.²

² Ostrogorsky (1968), pp. 374–5.

Recently, this view has been replaced by the realization that the privileges and immunities bestowed by the Comnenian emperors did not in themselves decentralize, weaken or impoverish the machinery of government and warfare. The Comnenian empire had all the apparatus of a fully developed pre-industrial state: a standing army and navy, regular monetary taxation and an elaborate bureaucracy. The armed forces performed indifferently, the taxation was oppressive and iniquitous and the bureaucracy often inefficient and corrupt, but under strong leadership the apparatus worked. Moreover, the resource base on which it worked was not obviously diminished by either the loss of territory in Asia Minor or the granting of exemptions. Rather, all the indications from written and material evidence are that agricultural production and trade intensified throughout the twelfth century, and that the government was reaping the benefits as well as the aristocracy, the monasteries and the Italian merchants.

The most eloquent testimony to the wealth of Byzantium in the late twelfth century comes from the observation of an Anglo-Norman writer, Gerald of Wales, that the revenues of the German and English monarchies were as nothing compared with those of the kingdom of Sicily and the Greek empire before these were destroyed 'by the Latins'; the yearly income from Palermo alone (a smaller city than Constantinople) exceeded that from the whole of England.³ Interesting here is the coupling of Byzantium and Sicily as wealthy states which were destroyed by northern European conquest. Gerald goes on to recall a remark of Louis VII of France, reported somewhat differently by Walter Map,⁴ contrasting the great resources of other kingdoms with the simple self-sufficiency of his own. The king of Germany had many armed men but no wealth, the rulers of Sicily and Greece were rich in gold and silk, but had no men who could do anything but talk, and the king of England had something of both. In the perception, and the reality, of statehood in twelfth-century Europe, strong finances and a strong war machine did not necessarily go together.

Byzantium's problem was one of survival in a world where weak, wealthy Mediterranean societies were in the way of northern warrior aristocracies with slender means and big appetites. Survival lay in the effective use of wealth to manage the bonds which kept the empire together and free from confrontation with potential aggressors. These bonds consisted in three characteristic features of the Comnenian empire which had either not existed or been less pronounced before 1081: the deep involvement of the empire with the Latin west, the centralization of power and resources in Constantinople and the emphasis on family, lineage and kinship as the defining elements in the Byzantine political system. The unravelling of all three features is clearly visible in the disintegration of imperial power at the end of the twelfth century.

³ Gerald of Wales, 'De principis instructione', III, pp. 316–17.

⁴ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, p. 451.

BYZANTIUM AND THE WEST

The empire's involvement with the west derived partly from its historic interest in the Italian peninsula, and partly from the consequences of its attempt to use western military power to restore its position in Asia. The relationship set up by the First Crusade persisted and intensified throughout the twelfth century, tying the empire's eastern interests to its western relations, and making the viability of its traditional role in the Christian Orient dependent upon its standing among the powers of the Latin west. The Second Crusade confirmed what John II had belatedly begun to realize in the 1130s: that to succeed, and even to survive, Byzantium needed to keep one move ahead of the crusading movement in preserving the Latin settlements in Syria; it needed to participate as an inside player in the power politics of western Christendom. In the thirty years following the crusade, Manuel had done all in his power to make the involvement inextricable and irreversible. The proliferation of ties with the Latin world which he cultivated so assiduously at all levels was a natural response to the growing volume of western business and religious interests in the eastern Mediterranean. These would have affected Byzantium regardless of imperial policy.

Yet the period following Manuel's death and the overthrow of the regency government of Alexios II saw reversion to something like the isolationism of John II's early years. Under Andronikos I, Isaac II and Alexios III, Byzantium opted out of the crusading movement at a time when crusading activity was intensifying, and abandoned the search for a high-level European entente with one or more of the major western powers. To some extent this was the result of a backlash against Manuel's expensive Latinophilia, which was carried to even greater excess by the regency government of Maria of Antioch; it proceeded inexorably from the massacre of the Latins in Constantinople, mostly Pisans and Genoese, which accompanied the seizure of power by Andronikos Komnenos in 1182, as well as from his liquidation of the key members of Manuel's family through whom dynastic links to the west had been forged: Manuel's widow Maria of Antioch, Manuel's daughter Maria and her husband Renier of Montferrat, and the young Alexios II himself. That Andronikos, who was probably older than Manuel, did not murder Alexios's child fiancée, Agnes of France, but forced her to marry him, can hardly have made her family warm to him. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that when he was threatened with invasion by the king of Sicily, the only western power prepared to ally with him was Venice, whose citizens had been unaffected by the massacre of 1182 and were only too glad to take advantage of the removal of the Pisans and Genoese. Nor is it surprising that Andronikos considered that imperial interests in the east were better served by alliance with the growing power of Saladin rather

than with the beleaguered Latin princes of Outremer, who no doubt remembered Andronikos's scandalous sexual adventures in Antioch and Jerusalem in 1166–7.

It is perhaps more remarkable that no realignment was attempted after 1185 by Isaac II Angelos, who otherwise had every reason to reject his predecessor's reign as a tyrannical deviation from the normal course of imperial policy. Isaac was not anti-western. Soon after his accession he took as his second wife Margaret, a daughter of Béla III of Hungary, and he invited Conrad of Montferrat, brother of the murdered Renier, to Constantinople, where he played a large part in defeating a major revolt (1187). Yet despite receiving the title of caesar, which Renier had held, and the hand of the emperor's sister in marriage, Conrad became dissatisfied and moved on to Syria, where he joined in the defence of Tyre against Saladin and became a candidate for the throne of Jerusalem. Isaac's renewal of Andronikos's alliance with Saladin may have been a factor in Conrad's disenchantment; what is certain is that Saladin's conquest of the Holy Land and the subsequent mobilization of the Third Crusade only confirmed Isaac in the alliance, from which he hoped to gain some sort of Byzantine dominion in Palestine, including the occupation of all the episcopal sees and the Holy Places, in return for obstructing the crusaders' advance. The rapprochement with Saladin should also be seen in the context of Isaac's treaties with Venice, which also took no part in the Third Crusade and stood to gain at the expense of Genoa and Pisa from either a Byzantine or a Muslim occupation of the coast of Palestine. In both alliances, one may detect the influence of Isaac's spiritual mentor, Dositheos, a Venetian-born monk who had predicted Isaac's rise to power and was rewarded accordingly by being appointed patriarch, first of Jerusalem, and then of Constantinople.

This disengagement from the Latin west – which was not total, since it gave the Venetians an even more privileged position in Byzantine society than they had enjoyed before 1171 – may have seemed more true to the 'national' interest, which was increasingly being seen in terms of Greek as well as Orthodox identity, than Manuel's costly commitments to allies with no love for the empire. Indeed, the process of dissolution had been started by one of those allies, Manuel's brother-in-law Bohemond III, who put aside his Comnenian wife well before Andronikos's usurpation. However, the empire paid dearly for its withdrawal. The pirates who terrorized the shipping and the coastal settlements of the Aegean world in the 1180s and 1190s came mainly from Pisa and Genoa, the cities which had suffered most from the massacre of 1182. The Sicilian invasion of 1185, which took Durazzo and went on to sack Thessalonica, could have been prevented if Andronikos had had firm alliances, or at least a proactive diplomacy, in the west. By failing to anticipate the Third Crusade, and by allying with Saladin instead of supporting the crusaders, Isaac II weakened

his moral claim for the restitution of the island of Cyprus when Richard I of England conquered it from its self-proclaimed emperor, Isaac Komnenos, in 1191: Cyprus was too important a source of supplies for the crusaders to entrust it to an unfriendly power. Isaac II also entered into a damaging confrontation with Frederick Barbarossa when the latter came through Byzantine territory on the overland route to Palestine (1189–90). The damage was not so much in the humiliating defeats inflicted by the German army, or in its systematic plundering of much of Macedonia and Thrace from its base at Philippopolis, as in the manifest contrast between Isaac's inability to obstruct a crusade which he wrongly assumed to be directed against Constantinople and Frederick's ability to threaten Constantinople if Isaac persisted in obstructing him. The contrast was painfully apparent to Niketas Choniates, who was assigned to Philippopolis at the time, and it was much appreciated by the Serbs and Vlachs, then in revolt against Byzantine authority, who offered to join forces with the Germans. Nor was the significance of the episode lost on Frederick's son Henry VI, whom Frederick had charged with collecting money and ships from Italy in preparation for an assault on Constantinople. When Henry succeeded as emperor after Frederick's tragic death by drowning in Cilicia, he inherited Frederick's unfulfilled crusading ambitions and placed them high on his agenda, along with his claim to the throne of Sicily which he derived from his marriage to Constance, the aunt of William II, who died childless in 1189. The danger from Henry VI spurred Isaac II into diplomatic action. In 1192, he negotiated the renewal of the empire's commercial treaties with Pisa and Genoa, the two cities which Henry relied on to provide him with ships for his conquest of Sicily. He also married his daughter Eirene to Roger of Apulia, the son of Tancred of Lecce, who had occupied the Sicilian throne in defiance of Henry's claim. But Eirene was widowed a year later, and in 1194 she was among the spoils which fell to Henry VI in his violent occupation of the Sicilian kingdom. He married her to his brother Philip of Swabia, thus making her an instrument in his policy of aggression against Byzantium.

It is uncertain whether Henry VI of Hohenstaufen really intended to take over the Byzantine empire by force, but he threatened to do so, and he used the threat, first against Isaac II, and then against Alexios III, to try and extort money and ships for his forthcoming crusade. Alexios accordingly levied an extraordinary tax, the *alamanikon*, to pay the tribute. He was saved by Henry's sudden death in 1197. Yet the episode showed that however much Byzantium wanted to opt out of the crusading movement, the crusading movement would not leave it alone. It had relinquished the initiative, but was still expected to pay the bill. On this point, the western empire and the papacy, although in all other respects implacable enemies, were in agreement. Pope Innocent III insisted on it in his letters to Alexios III: Alexios ought to model himself on

Manuel, whose devotion to the cause of the Holy Land and the unity of the church had been exemplary.

Isolationism still might have worked, and the Byzantine empire might just have been allowed to find a niche as a neutral regional power, if the Fourth Crusade, preached in 1198, had gone according to its original plan of sailing directly against Egypt. The crusade seems to have been intended to bypass Byzantium completely, and the conquest of Egypt would not only have liberated the Holy Land, but made the crusader settlements materially self-sufficient. But the leadership failed to communicate its strategic vision to the majority of crusaders. The army which assembled in Venice was well below the numbers which the Venetians had estimated in building and equipping the fleet. A detour via Byzantium thus seemed an irresistible option, indeed, the only option for keeping the crusade on course, when a pretender to the imperial throne conveniently turned up with a promise of rich rewards if the crusaders restored him to what he plausibly claimed was his rightful inheritance. The pretender was Alexios, son of the deposed Isaac II, who had escaped from custody in Constantinople and gone to join his sister Eirene and her second husband, Philip of Swabia; the promise, no doubt formulated on Philip's advice and calculated partly on the basis of the demands made by Henry VI, was to place the empire under the obedience of the Roman church, to pay 200,000 silver marks and supply provisions for every man in the army, to send 10,000 men with the expedition to Egypt and to maintain 500 knights for the defence of Outremer for the duration of his lifetime. As Isaac II later remarked, 'this is a big commitment, and I do not know how it can be kept',⁵ especially since Byzantium was to get no share in the conquest of Egypt. Whether or not the crusade leaders knew that the offer was too good to be true, the diversion to Constantinople attracted them for other reasons. It appealed to Boniface of Montferrat, who saw a chance to claim the Byzantine inheritance of which his brothers Renier and Conrad had been cheated. It appealed to Enrico Dandolo, the doge of Venice, which stood not only to recover the costs of the fleet, but also to improve its trading position in Constantinople from the restoration of Isaac II, a much better friend than Alexios III, who had tended to favour Genoa and Pisa despite his confirmation of Venetian privileges in 1198. It could be made to appeal to the crusaders from northern France by reminding them of the generosity with which Manuel had treated their forebears.

The diversion of the Fourth Crusade was thus a reversion to a prevailing tendency. Now, however, Byzantium had to promise much more than it could expect in return, and Byzantium's weakness could not really help the crusading movement. The problem for both the Byzantines and the crusaders was that

⁵ Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *La conquête de Constantinople*, 1, §189, p. 192.

the latter came to Constantinople in 1203 at the invitation not of a reigning emperor, but of a rival claimant for power and resources that were dwindling rapidly. In 1197, Alexios III had only just managed to raise the money to buy off Henry VI. By 1203 Alexios IV had a much smaller resource base from which to make good his promises: Alexios III had emptied the treasury on fleeing from Constantinople, and he and his supporters in the provinces naturally denied the government in Constantinople the provincial revenues which they controlled. Alexios IV made himself unpopular in Constantinople by his demands for money, by resorting to the requisitioning of church valuables and by consorting with the crusaders; he then alienated the crusaders by failing to keep up his payments. His overthrow and murder in a palace coup by Alexios Doukas Mourtzouphlos relieved them of the embarrassment of making war on their own protégé and gave their renewed attack on Constantinople the status of a holy war against a traitor and regicide. Alexios V put up a competent defence, but it could not prevent the Venetians from using their ships to storm the low sea walls on the Golden Horn; and when the crusaders entered the city the defence collapsed. The crusaders were thus able to gorge themselves on the riches of Constantinople, set up a Latin regime and divide up the empire on paper. However, making the division a reality proved much harder, and in the end they held on to only a fraction of the twelfth-century empire. The Fourth Crusade never reached Egypt, and the Latin empire of Constantinople operated at a loss.

CONSTANTINOPLE AND THE PROVINCES

The Byzantine state was one of the most centralized in the medieval world, and never more so than in the period 1081–1180, when the loss of central and eastern Anatolia forced the empire's military elite, as well as its bureaucratic elite, to identify with the capital as never before. Territorial contraction thus accentuated the already marked tendency of the Byzantine aristocracy to think fiscally rather than territorially, to invest in office holding rather than land holding. Indeed, it is possible to see a correlation between the centralized structure of the Comnenian empire and its territorial limits, which were essentially those of the area within which expeditionary forces mobilized from Constantinople could operate without allied help, and within which the emperor could safely absent himself from Constantinople. By these criteria, the Danube and the Adriatic were within the range of imperial government from Constantinople, but southern Italy, Iconium and Egypt were not, and the empire was overextended in Dalmatia, Cilicia and Syria. Thus the empire consisted of those territories which a secure, mobile, military emperor could control from Constantinople. Those territories corresponded by and large to the limits of Greek linguistic

culture and Orthodox Christianity. The main exceptions were, first, in the Balkan interior, where Slavonic, Vlach and Albanian speakers predominated, along with a sizeable, non-integrated Armenian population, and, secondly, in the areas of southern Italy and Asia Minor which had been lost to the empire in the late eleventh century, and in which Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians were numerous. Looked at another way, Byzantium, or 'Romania', as its inhabitants referred to it, corresponded to the area needed to support a large standing army and navy, an expensive international diplomacy and an enormous capital city. There was an outer frontier zone, broad in the Balkans, thin in Asia Minor, which was partly protective shield and partly forward base for imperial operations in Italy and Syria. In this zone, direct imperial administration was limited to a few key strongholds, and local resources were either unexploited (to starve invading forces), untaxed (to secure local loyalties) or used to pay for regional defence and diplomacy (notably the case in Cyprus). Surrounded by this zone, in an area consisting essentially of the Aegean and southern Black Sea hinterland, the core Comnenian empire existed largely to maintain the safety, the opulence and the population of Constantinople.

The pull of Constantinople was due not only to its role as the administrative capital, but also to its status as the 'reigning city' of New Rome, an unrivalled showcase of holy relics, glittering treasures, ancient public monuments and magnificent buildings, a megalopolis with a population somewhere between 200,000 and 400,000 which appears to have been growing steadily throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, even as the empire contracted overall in territorial extent. By the late twelfth century, the relationship between the 'reigning city' and the provinces was seen, on both sides, as that of a metropolis to its satellite tributaries, which were inhabited by culturally inferior second-class citizens. Ownership of the empire's prime agricultural land was overwhelmingly concentrated in Constantinople. In the 'outer territories', as opposed to Constantinople, heretics abounded, ignorance of the law was standard, uncanonical, semi-pagan religious customs were practised, people spoke bad Greek and there was no protection against corrupt and brutal officials. Yet this unequal relationship obviously depended on the productivity of the suppliers, on the ability of provincial communities to provide the metropolis not only with money, foodstuffs, manpower and raw materials, but also, increasingly, with manufactured goods, such as silks from Thebes and knives from Thessalonica. It is abundantly clear that Constantinople was not the only place where urban society was expanding. It is also clear, although documentation is patchy, that revenue could not have been raised or military defence organized in the localities without the cooperation and participation of the local aristocracy, the *archontes*. In frontier cities, such as Durazzo, Philadelphia or Trebizond, their loyalty was crucial in keeping invaders out.

Equally, in those parts of Asia Minor which had come under Turkish rule, the attitude of the local notables was crucial in the empire's failure to recover lost territory. The administration of the *pronoia* system, the conditional allocation of state lands and revenues as livings to mounted soldiers, which was greatly extended by Manuel I, must have created opportunities for patronage at the local level. Thus, as Constantinople became more and more self-important, self-centred and exclusive of the 'outer territories', it became increasingly noticeable that Constantinople needed the 'outer territories' more than the latter needed Constantinople. The perception may have existed before 1180, but it found expression, for the first time in the middle ages, in the following years, as central government proved less and less capable of protecting the provinces from raiders and invaders. The period 1180–1204 also saw the resurgence of the populace of Constantinople as a political factor for the first time since 1082, in changes of regime, in anti-government and anti-Latin riots and in opposition to imperial demands for money to buy off Henry VI and the Fourth Crusade.

Under Manuel's successors, the provinces of the Comnenian empire were lost to imperial control or became centres of opposition to the government in Constantinople. The process began, predictably, in areas of the frontier zone where the empire's hold had been short or shaky, and administration largely in the hands of local potentates. Soon after Manuel's death, Béla III of Hungary seized Byzantine Dalmatia and Sirmium, which he considered to be his own patrimony. Next to secede were the Serbs of Raška, and the Armenians of Cilicia, whose princes, Stephen Nemanja and Roupen II, had always been unwilling vassals of the emperor. In the process, Roupen took possession of the last Byzantine cities in Cilicia, capturing their governor, Isaac Komnenos, and then releasing him on payment of a ransom from Andronikos I; this he promptly spent, no doubt with the connivance of Roupen and Bohemond III of Antioch, on making himself lord of Cyprus (1185), where he ruled independently until dispossessed by Richard I and the Third Crusade. At least initially, Isaac had the support of the local aristocracy. The usurpation of Andronikos also provoked rebellions in two major cities of north-western Asia Minor, Nicaea and Prousa, and dissatisfaction with his rule may have contributed to the ease with which the Sicilian army took Durazzo in 1185 and advanced unopposed to Thessalonica.

The most serious and damaging centrifugal movement, however, was provoked not by the 'tyrant' Andronikos, but by Isaac II Angelos, the emperor who delivered the empire from Andronikos's tyranny. This was the Vlach revolt started by the brothers Peter and Asan and continued by their brother John. As it spread, the revolt came to resemble the other ethnic separatist movements, those of the Serbs and Armenians. Like them, it occurred in a mountainous frontier area, it was boosted by the Third Crusade and it resulted in the

formation of a national kingdom, whose ruler received a crown from the pope. Yet there were differences: the revolt of Peter and Asan involved two peoples, the Vlaxhs and the Bulgarians, and the kingdom it created was a conscious resurrection of the first Bulgarian empire of the tenth century. Like its predecessor, it was not marginal to the Byzantine heartland, but encroached significantly on the agricultural hinterland of Constantinople and the northern Aegean. Moreover, it originated in what had been, for almost a century, the most trouble-free sector of the frontier zone, where there were no local dynasties with a history of political insubordination, and contacts with the neighbouring nomads, the Cumans, took the form of peaceful commerce in the cities of the lower Danube. The revolt resulted largely from the complacency that is evident, first, in Isaac II's failure to prevent, punish or recompense the rapacity of his officials who seized Vlach livestock for his marriage feast; secondly, in his rude rejection of Peter and Asan when they requested a modest benefice; thirdly, in his failure to move quickly to deprive the rebels of their military advantages, their mountain strongholds and their Cuman allies. Peter and Asan were thus local chieftains politicized by the carelessness of central government. In this, they may have had something in common with Theodore Mangaphas, a Greek magnate in Philadelphia, who used his proximity to the Turkish frontier to declare independence from Isaac II. Although eventually subdued by Isaac, Mangaphas re-emerged at the time of the Fourth Crusade, as one of several 'dynasts' who took advantage of the changes of regime in Constantinople to seize power in their localities. By then, many other rebels had more or less successfully defied imperial authority from a variety of provincial power-bases.

It is difficult to generalize about the origins and aims of all these figures. Several were from the Comnenian nobility, and ultimately sought power at the centre. Others (Ivanko, Dobromir Chrysos) were by-products of the Vlach-Bulgarian revolt. A certain Spyridonakes, who followed their example, was a Cypriot immigrant who had worked in the treasury of the imperial household and then been posted as administrator of Smolena in the Rhodope mountains. Aldobrandinus, who ruled Attaleia in 1204, may have been a Pisan pirate. The others must have originated among the provincial *archontes*, and notably among the local cadres of military recruitment and defence. They included the least ephemeral of the local lordships to emerge before the formation of the Byzantine successor states: that of Theodore Mangaphas in Philadelphia, the main command centre on the eastern frontier, and those of Leo Sgouros and Leo Chamaretos in the coastal towns of the eastern Peloponnese which contributed contingents to the imperial fleet.

Whatever the specific origins and aims of these individuals, they all shared the conviction that more was to be gained from opposition than from service to central government, and that they could count on provincial support. The

trend they represented received a spectacular endorsement in 1203, when it was joined by the emperor Alexios III. Instead of persisting in the defence of Constantinople against the crusaders, he decided to abandon the city to Alexios IV, and to establish his court at Mosynopolis in Thrace, where he drew on the resources of a rich hinterland extending as far as Thessalonica.

THE COMNENIAN FAMILY SYSTEM

The most distinctive, as well as the most fatal, characteristic of the Comnenian empire was the identification of the state with the imperial family: this was the essence of what used to be labelled the feudalism of the Comnenian dynasty. In some ways, Manuel's regime looks less feudal than that of Alexios or John, despite his liking for the culture and the company of western knighthood. As he matured, according to Choniates, 'he ruled more autocratically, treating his subjects not as free men but as if they were servants who belonged to him by inheritance.'⁶ His reliance on eunuchs recalls the pre-Comnenian period, as do his attempts to cut back on grants of privilege and immunity. Yet the cut-back was mainly at the expense of the church and of the Italian maritime republics. All other indications are that he was at least as indulgent to his extended family as his father and grandfather had been, and that he was scrupulous in maintaining a strict hierarchy by blood-relationship. He created one new title, that of *despotes*, for Béla-Alexios of Hungary, when designating him as his future son-in-law and heir to the throne; the title lapsed at the birth of Alexios II, but it was revived by later emperors, and it remained the most senior of the three titles (the others were *sebastokrator* and *caesar*) which were reserved for the emperor's immediate family, and carried semi-imperial status, allowing their bearers to wear quasi-imperial insignia and to sit with the emperor on ceremonial occasions. Manuel may also have introduced certain changes to the titulature of the wider circle of imperial relatives. In the earlier years of the dynasty, all relatives by blood or marriage below the rank of *caesar* had been designated by variants of the title *sebastos*. In the ceremonial lists of Manuel's reign, however, the imperial nephews and cousins, who stand next to the enthroned imperial family, have no titles beyond their kinship designation, with the sole exception of the senior imperial nephew, who is *protosebastos* ('first *sebastos*') and *protovestiarios*, i.e. head of the imperial household. The ranks of the *sebastoi* begin at the next level down, and, among them, those who are designated as the emperor's *gambroi*, that is the husbands of his female nieces and cousins, rank senior to those whose relationship is too distant to be named. Not only are ranks carefully graded by degree of kinship to the emperor, and

⁶ Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 60.

within each degree according to the seniority of the kinsman through whom the kinship is traced, but kinship designations begin to take the place of titles.

In addition to this continual articulation of the imperial family system, Manuel's reign witnessed its further extension downwards from the military to the bureaucracy, and outwards into the sphere of foreign relations. As the Comnenian aristocracy proliferated, more of its members came to hold civilian office, while others married into the more illustrious civilian families, one of which, the Kamateroi, was already connected with the Doukai and well on the way to establishing its later ascendancy in the church and the bureaucracy. The marriage diplomacy of Alexios I and John II had created blood lines leading from the Komnenoi to ruling dynasties in Russia, the Caucasus, Hungary and Germany. Manuel more than doubled the network with marriage alliances that related the imperial family in Constantinople to royal and princely families in Austria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Tuscany, Piedmont, northern France and Languedoc. Marriage alliances were also discussed with Henry II of England and William II of Sicily. This was perhaps the closest Byzantium came to being at the centre of an international 'family of kings': even the sultan of Iconium was included by virtue of his ritual adoption as the emperor's son. That Manuel saw a close connection between his internal and external families is evident in the way he interfered with the church's marriage legislation on the forbidden degrees of kinship and punished men from undistinguished bureaucratic families who threatened to devalue the status of Comnenian brides by attempting to marry into noble families.

In 1180, then, the political existence of the Byzantine empire was governed by kinship and lineage to an unprecedented degree. The future of the system consisted as never before in the cohesion of the extended imperial family. For a century that cohesion had been managed by the emperor as head of the family, but now that the emperor was an eleven-year-old, it depended on a consensus of loyalty to the young Alexios II among the Comnenian nobility. Manuel did what he could to create a framework of collective patriotic and familial responsibility: he set up a regency council, perhaps based on his inner circle of advisers, comprising his widow, the patriarch and a number of relatives. The latter were presumably selected on the basis of seniority, although Choniates indicates that they participated on a basis of equality. At the same time, he obtained guarantees from the sultan, the prince of Antioch, the king of Jerusalem and possibly other members of the external 'family of kings' that they would defend Alexios's inheritance.

With hindsight it seems clear, and contemporaries seem to have sensed, that these measures were doomed to failure. The Comnenian family had been prone to factionalism from the time of Alexios I, and its solidarity inevitably weakened with every generation that multiplied the number of household units

(*oikoi*) with which the imperial *oikos* at the heart of the kin-group (*genos*) had to share the finite resources of an empire which all continued to regard as the Comnenian family patrimony. The accessions of John and Manuel had not gone unchallenged, and although Manuel saw off his original challengers, the *sebastokrators* Isaac, his brother and uncle, the latter's place was taken by his son Andronikos, while the former's supporters seem to have gravitated towards Alexios Axouch, the husband of Manuel's niece by the emperor's late brother Alexios. Axouch's 'conspiracy' in 1167 was quickly disposed of, but Andronikos was a constant worry to Manuel from 1154, almost as troublesome during his long spells in prison, from which he escaped twice (1159 and 1164), and in exile among the empire's eastern neighbours (1167–80), as he was during his brief period of liberty. After his return and rehabilitation in Manuel's final year, he was understandably sent – like his father before him – into a comfortable internal exile on the Black Sea coast. But this exclusion from Constantinople played into Andronikos's hands, by giving him a provincial power-base where he could recruit supporters, and by casting him as an impartial outsider to the selfish intrigues which divided the regency council of Alexios II, to the gross neglect of the boy's upbringing and the public interest. According to Choniates, there were those who lusted after the widowed empress and sought to seduce her, those who lusted after money and appropriated public funds to meet their growing expenses and those who lusted after imperial power.⁷ Elsewhere he describes them in somewhat different terms: 'Some of his noble guardians winged their way repeatedly like bees to the provinces and stored up money like honey, others like goats hankered after the tender shoots of empire which they continually longed to crop, while others grew fat like pigs on filthy lucre.'⁸ The emphasis on money-making is interesting, particularly the implied distinction between the misappropriation of tax revenue from the provinces, and the sordid enrichment from the profits of trade, and possibly of prostitution, in Constantinople. It shows that the search for funds to maintain an aristocratic lifestyle was a constant motivating factor in political loyalty.

His enforced isolation thus put Andronikos in an ideal position, which he exploited masterfully, to pose as the champion of Alexios II's best interests, which the boy's guardians were patently neglecting, and to win the sympathies of the many noble figures in Constantinople, including Manuel's daughter Maria, who resented the dominance which one of the regency council, Manuel's nephew the *protosebastos* Alexios, acquired over the young emperor by forming an amorous liaison with the dowager empress. After the tension between Maria and the *protosebastos* broke out in armed conflict, Andronikos's intervention became inevitable.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 223–4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 227–8.

If Andronikos, once in power, had kept his election promises and formed a genuinely inclusive regency government for Alexios II, it is possible that he might have held the Comnenian nobility together. His programme of administrative reform, admirable in itself, could have won him support even among his peers if he had treated them fairly and generously. But by instituting a reign of terror against all potential rivals for the regency, including the emperor's sister and mother, he provoked a serious revolt in Asia Minor; then, by going on to eliminate Alexios II and settle the succession on his son John, he removed the only focus of consensus among the Comnenian kin-group, and committed himself to dependence on a faction bound to him by self-interest. The terror continued, and those who could escaped it by fleeing abroad, to the courts of rulers who had had ties or treaties with Manuel and Alexios II. Thus the sultan, the prince and patriarch of Antioch, the king of Jerusalem, the pope, Frederick Barbarossa, the marquis of Montferrat, the king of Hungary and, above all, the king of Sicily were approached by refugees imploring their intervention. It was at the insistence of Manuel's great-nephew, the *pinkernes* Alexios Komnenos, that William II of Sicily sent the invasion force which took Durazzo and Thessalonica in 1185. The stated aim of the expedition was to replace Andronikos with a young man claiming to be Alexios II: Pseudo-Alexioi were the inconvenient but inevitable consequence – for later emperors as well – of the fact that Andronikos had sunk Alexios's body in the Bosphorus. The Sicilian invasion thus not only recalled the past invasions of Rober Guiscard, Bohemond and Roger II; it also set a precedent for the diversion of the Fourth Crusade, both by the damage and humiliation it caused, and in the way it involved the external 'family of kings' in the politics of the Comnenian family.

Andronikos would probably have succeeded eventually in repelling the Sicilian invasion, as he succeeded in quelling every organized conspiracy against him, but the very diligence of his agents in hunting down potential conspirators led, quite unpredictably, to the spontaneous uprising which toppled him. When his chief agent went to arrest a suspect who had given no cause for suspicion, the suspect slew the agent in desperation, and then did the only thing he could do in order to avoid immediate capital punishment: he rushed for asylum to the church of St Sophia. A crowd gathered, Andronikos – evidently feeling secure – was out of town and, St Sophia being also the imperial coronation church, one thing led to another. So Isaac Angelos became emperor because he was in the right place at the right time, and this had a decisive effect on the course of his reign. His propagandists claimed, and he firmly believed, that his accession was providential, that he was the Angel of the Lord sent by heaven to end the tyranny, so that his whole reign was ordained, blessed and protected by God. He considered his power irreproachable and untouchable,

and he exercised it with a mixture of grandiosity and complacency which was quite inappropriate to the situation. For other important people did not share his belief. His miraculous elevation was not enough to convince Isaac Komnenos in Cyprus, Peter and Asan in Bulgaria, Theodore Mangaphas in Philadelphia and Basil Chotzas at Tarsia, near Nicomedia, that they owed loyalty to Constantinople, or to prevent two young men from raising rebellions by pretending to be Alexios II. Among his own close family, it did not make up for his lack of seniority, or his military incompetence: he was challenged by his uncle John and his nephew Constantine. The Comnenian nobility as a whole were not impressed, because many of them had equally good, if not better, dynastic claims in terms of the hierarchy of kinship which had operated under Manuel: Isaac was descended from Alexios I's youngest daughter, but others could trace their descent through the male line, and some could count John II among their ancestors. For several of them, Isaac's success was only an incentive to follow it and turn up at St Sophia in the hope of being acclaimed. The first to try this was Alexios Branas, the general who had halted the Sicilian invasion. Having failed in this first attempt, he waited until he was put in command of the army sent to quell the Vlakh revolt. What made his rebellion so dangerous was the fact that he combined good Comnenian lineage with military expertise and strong family connections among the military aristocracy of Adrianople. Isaac was saved only by the loyalty of the people of Constantinople and a bold sortie by Conrad of Montferrat.

During ten years in power, Isaac II faced at least seventeen revolts, a number exceeded in the eleventh and twelfth centuries only by the twenty-one plots that are recorded for the thirty-nine-year reign of Alexios I. Isaac undoubtedly saw something providential in the fact of his survival, but repeated opposition took its toll on the effectiveness of his rule, by making it virtually impossible for him to delegate important military commands to highly competent noble commanders. This was probably decisive for the outcome of the rebellion of Peter and Asan. Lack of support among the Comnenian nobility may have prompted what was seen to be Isaac's excessive favouritism to his chief bureaucrat, his non-Comnenian maternal uncle Theodore Kastamonites, and to the latter's successor in office, Constantine Mesopotamites. It certainly drove the members of five leading Comnenian families, Palaiologos, Branas, Kantakouzenos, Raoul and Petraliphas, to mount the coup in 1195 which replaced Isaac with his elder brother Alexios III.

Sibling rivalry had, as we have seen, threatened to destroy the Comnenian system in the past, but it had been kept under control, and its eruption into successful usurpation sealed the fate of the system in its twelfth-century phase. Choniates saw the overthrow of brother by brother as the supreme manifestation of the moral depravity for which the fall of Constantinople was just

retribution.⁹ From the deposition of Isaac II proceeded the escape of his son Alexios to the west just when the Fourth Crusade needed an excuse for a detour via Constantinople. In their comeback, the internal and external dimensions of the system fatally converged. Choniates, perhaps looking back to Andronikos and even to his father, saw a pattern:

If anything was the supreme cause that the Roman power collapsed to its knees and suffered the seizure of lands and cities, and, finally, itself underwent annihilation, this was the members of the Komnenoi who revolted and usurped power. For, dwelling among the nations which were unfriendly to the Romans, they were the bane of their country, even though when they stayed at home they were ineffectual, useless and incompetent in anything they tried to undertake.¹⁰

This retribution apart, however, Alexios III faced relatively little opposition from the Komnenoi. In 1200–1 there were provincial revolts led by his cousins Michael Angelos and Manuel Kamytzes, and a one-day occupation of the Great Palace in Constantinople by a son of Alexios Axouch, John Komnenos the Fat. But otherwise, Alexios had fairly good support in the bureaucracy and the church through his connection by marriage into the Kamateros family, and the consortium of Comnenian families which brought him to power appear to have been satisfied with his *laissez-faire* regime, and with his adoption of the name Komnenos in preference to Angelos. All five families flourished after 1204; four were to be prominent after 1261 in the restored empire of the Palaiologoi, and the Palaiologoi gained a head start in their future ascendancy from the marriage which Alexios III arranged between his daughter Eirene and Alexios Palaiologos.

The marriage of another daughter, Anna, to Theodore Laskaris laid the dynastic basis for the empire of Nicaea, the most successful of the three main Greek successor states after 1204. Cousins of Isaac II and Alexios III established the western state which enjoyed brief glory as the empire of Thessalonica and then survived in north-western Greece as the despotate of Epiros. The empire of Trebizond, which lasted until 1461, was ruled by a dynasty calling themselves the Grand Komnenoi, who were descended from Andronikos I.

Under the successors of Manuel I, the Comnenian system, centred on Constantinople, was programmed for self-destruction. Relocated to the provinces after 1204 through the leading families of the last twelfth-century regimes, it ensured the survival of the Byzantine empire for another two and a half centuries, while losing none of its divisive potential.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 453–4, 532.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 529.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AHP</i>	<i>Archivum Historiae Pontificiae</i>
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>Annales ESC</i>	<i>Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations</i>
<i>ANS</i>	<i>Anglo-Norman Studies</i>
<i>BEC</i>	<i>Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes</i>
<i>BF</i>	<i>Byzantische Forschungen</i>
<i>BHL</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina</i>
<i>BIHR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
<i>BISI</i>	<i>Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo e Archivio Muratoriano</i>
<i>BMGS</i>	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
<i>BS</i>	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CCCM</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis</i>
<i>CCM</i>	<i>Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale</i>
<i>COD</i>	<i>Conciliarum oecumenicorum decreta</i> , ed. J. Alberigo, J. A. Dossetti <i>et al.</i> , 3rd edn, Bologna (1973)
<i>DA</i>	<i>Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters</i>
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>EEBS</i>	<i>Epeteris Etaireias Vizantinon Spoudon</i>
<i>EEMCA</i>	<i>Estudios de Edad Media de la Corona de Aragón</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>FmaSt</i>	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
<i>FSI</i>	<i>Fonti per la Storia d'Italia</i> , ed. Istituto Storico Italiano, 118 vols. so far, Rome (1887–)
<i>HZ</i>	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>

JL	<i>Regesta pontificum Romanorum ab condita ecclesia ad annum post Christum natum MCXCVIII</i> , ed. P. Jaffé, 2nd edn, rev. ed. S. Loewenfeld, F. Kaltenbrunner and P. Ewald, 2 vols., Leipzig (1885–8)
JMH	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
JöB	<i>Jahrbuch des österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
MA	<i>Le Moyen Age</i>
Mansi	<i>Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio</i> , ed. G. D. Mansi, 55 vols., Venice and Florence (1759–98)
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> , ed. G. H. Pertz <i>et al.</i> , Hanover, Weimar, Stuttgart and Cologne (1826–)
Constitutiones	<i>Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum</i> , 11 vols. so far (1893–)
Diplomata	<i>Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae</i> , 19 vols. so far (1879–)
Epistolae	<i>Die Briefe des deutschen Kaiserzeit</i> , 8 vols. so far (1949–)
Epp. sel.	<i>Epistolae selectae</i> , 5 vols. so far (1916–)
Libelli	<i>Libelli de lite imperatorum et pontificum saeculis XI. et XII. conscripti</i> , 3 vols. (1891–7)
S	<i>Scriptores</i> , 38 vols. so far (1826–)
Schriften	<i>Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> , 51 vols. so far (1938–)
SRG	<i>Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi</i> , 75 vols. so far (1871–)
SRG NS	<i>Scriptores rerum Germanicarum. Nova series</i> , 18 vols. so far (1922–)
MIÖG	<i>Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung</i>
NA	<i>Neues Archiv</i>
NCMH	<i>The New Cambridge Medieval History</i>
OCP	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
PaP	<i>Past and Present</i>
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina</i> , comp. J. P. Migne, 221 vols., Paris (1844–64)
QFIAB	<i>Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken</i>
RBén	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
REB	<i>Revue des Etudes Byzantines</i>
RES-EE	<i>Revue des Etudes Sud-est Européennes</i>

<i>RHC Occ.</i>	<i>Recueil des historiens des croisades. Historiens occidentaux</i> , ed. Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 5 vols., Paris (1844–95)
<i>RHE</i>	<i>Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique</i>
<i>RHGF</i>	<i>Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France</i> , ed. M. Bouquet and M.-J.-J. Brial, 24 vols., Paris (1738–1904)
<i>RIS NS</i>	<i>Rerum Italicarum Scriptores</i> , 2nd edn, ed. G. Carducci <i>et. al.</i> , 34 vols. so far, Città di Castello and Bologna (1900–)
<i>RS</i>	<i>Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores</i> , publ. under the direction of the Master of the Rolls, 99 vols., London (1858–96)
<i>SG</i>	<i>Studi Gregoriani</i>
<i>TM</i>	<i>Travaux et Mémoires</i>
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>VV</i>	<i>Vizantiniskij Verimenik</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
<i>ZRG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte</i>
<i>ZRVI</i>	<i>Zbornik Radova Vizantinoloskog Instituta</i>
<i>ZSSRG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte</i>
<i>KA</i>	<i>Kanonistische Abteilung</i>

LISTS OF RULERS

*Christian rulers**1 Byzantine emperors, 976–1204*

Basil II, 976–1205
 Constantine VIII, 1025–8
 Romanos III Argyros, 1028–34
 Michael IV, 1034–41
 Michael V, 1041–2
 Zoe and Theodora, 1042
 Constantine IX Monomachos, 1042–55
 Theodora (again), 1055–6
 Michael VI, 1056–7
 Isaac I Komnenos, 1057–9
 Constantine X Doukas, 1059–67
 Romanos IV Diogenes, 1068–71
 Michael VII Doukas, 1071–8
 Nikephoros III Botaneiates, 1078–81
 Alexios I Komnenos, 1081–1118
 John II Komnenos, 1118–43
 Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–80
 Alexios II Komnenos, 1180–3
 Andronikos I Komnenos, 1183–5
 Isaac II Angelos, 1185–95
 Alexios III Angelos, 1195–1203
 Isaac II Angelos (again) and Alexios IV Angelos, 1203–4
 Alexios V Murtzouphlos, 1204

2 Popes, 1012–1216

Benedict VIII, 18 May 1012; died 9 Apr. 1024
 John XIX, Apr. or May 1024; died 20 Oct. 1032
 Benedict IX, 1032; resigned Sept. 1044
 Silvester III, 20 Jan. 1045; deposed 10 Mar. 1045
 Benedict IX, for the second time, 10 Mar. 1045; deposed 20 Dec. 1046
 Gregory VI, 5 May 1045; deposed 20 Dec. 1046
 Clement II, 25 Dec. 1046; died 9 Oct. 1047
 Benedict IX, for the third time, returned 8 Nov. 1047; expelled 17 July 1048
 Damasus II, 17 July 1048; died 9 Aug. 1048
 Leo IX, 12 Feb. 1049; died 19 Apr. 1054
 Victor II, 13 Apr. 1055; died 28 July 1057
 Stephen X, 3 Aug. 1057; died 29 Mar. 1058

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